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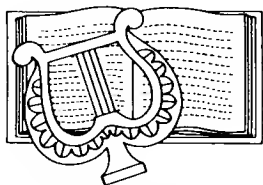
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BEPPPO, THE CONSCRIPT.

A Novel.

BY

T. ADOLPHUS TROLLOPE,

AUTHOR OF

“GIULIO MALATESTA,”

“MARIETTA,”

“LA BEATA,”

ETC.

FOURTH EDITION.

LONDON:

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BEPPÒ, THE CONSCRIPT.

BOOK I.

AT BELLA LUCE.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

ONCE upon a time the narrow strip of territory shut in between the Apennine and the Adriatic to the south of Bologna, and to the north of Ancona, was, as Byron has written of Venice,

The pleasant place of all festivity,
The revel of the earth, the masque of Italy.

That small district, so niggardly squeezed in between the encroaching mountains and the sea, was once one of the high places not only of Italian but of European civilisation. It was there that the brilliant dynasties of Rovero and Montefeltro held courts at Pesaro, at Urbino, or, a little further inland among the hills, at Gubbio, which gathered around them all that was most distinguished in poesy, in scholarship, in art, and in chivalry. It was there that Tasso wandered among the green valleys and by streams made classical for the second time in their existence by his genius—wandered now a brilliant cour-

tier, and now an outcast mendicant, as the breeze of court favour, or more surely his own love-sick fancies and morbid imagination impelled him. There flows from its ice-cold cradle in the higher Apennine to its glowing death-bed in the genial Adriatic, that storied Metauro, whose second golden age, thanks to the imperishable names and memories attached to the halcyon days of the Ducal House of Urbino, has well-nigh eclipsed the glories of its first. There, mostly on the sea-board of the Adriatic, are a constellation of cities, once the chosen abode of the arts, of prosperity, and civilised culture in every kind; the rescued fragments of whose wealth have furnished forth the museums of every country in Europe, and the story of whose prime is one with that of the morning-tide vigour of every liberal art.

It is a different region now! And a very different spectacle, and other ideas and associations are impressed on the mind of the wanderer among those Adriatic cities! The Church stretched over them its leaden hand and numbed them! Priestly power came and literature ceased; education was no more; commerce pined and died; wealth made itself wings and flew away; all energy departed from them; the national character became deteriorated; the cities decayed; palaces fell to ruin; even churches were defaced and their beauty destroyed by the base greed and tasteless vandalism of a clergy, whose scope was to use religion as a begging impostor's swindle. Ever increasing poverty, and the spreading canker of mendicancy, invaded fields and cities. Lazy squalor, brutifying superstition, and the degrading and unmanly vices fostered by the morality of the confessional, marked the fallen region as their own!

It was not to be wondered at that a population which had stagnated and languished under priestly government, while the rest of the world had been more or less rapidly and unmistakably progressing and improving itself, and which had long been hopelessly and fruitlessly beating its maimed and broken wings against the bars of its prison-house, should have seized with boundless enthu-

siasm the first really promising chance of escape! Nobody was, and only few pretended to be, surprised, when the all but entire population of Romagna rose to welcome their deliverers from the worse than Egyptian bondage under which they had been suffering, and to assist in the not very arduous effort needed for driving their oppressors from the country.

But neither should it have been surprising, though many more persons were surprised at it, that a population, which had grown up under such circumstances, moral and political, should have shown itself, as soon as the first enthusiastic impulse, by which it had achieved its deliverance, was spent, little fitted for the duties and discipline of well-policed political and social life, and above all indisposed for further regularised efforts and sacrifices, the necessity for which was not apparent to them, or at all events did not recommend itself to them as requisite for their own escape from present suffering. There was nothing, I say, in this that might not have been anticipated. As usual, the emancipated slaves thought that every kind of prosperity, happiness and well-being was to be the immediate result of their emancipation; that no further self-sacrifice was needed; that a millennium of universal cakes and ale had arrived; and all troubles—at all events all troubles connected with the governing of the country—had been got rid of for ever.

Of course the disappointment that awaited on the waking from this dream was great. Of course a certain measure of discontent with the new order of things supervened. Of course this was increased to the utmost, and in every way made the most of, by those whose interests or prejudices placed them among the "*laudatores temporis acti*." The class which might be so designated in the Romagna was a very small one. But it was one that wielded a special and peculiar power; for it embraced the very great majority of the clergy. The clerical government, and its myrmidons, whether lay or clerical, might be driven out. But it was impossible to drive out all the

clergy in the country. It was impossible to deprive parishes of their parish priests. The deposed government thus left behind it a special and very effective army, vowed unalterably to its interests. And this army was composed of a class of men to whose consciences *all* means were lawful for the destruction, if possible—for the embarrassment, if more than that were not possible, of the new rulers. And it is difficult to exaggerate the power which such a mass and such a class of irreclaimable malcontents exercised, when a special point of attack was offered to them, by any particular subject of discontent felt by the bulk of the population against any particular part of the conduct of the new government.

Such a point of attack was offered to them by the conscription laws.

Military service was in the highest degree repugnant to the feelings of the Romagnole peasant. He had been used to suffer almost every evil that could result from bad and oppressive government, but he had not been used to this. It presented itself to his mind as a new and unheard-of form of calamity—a burthen the more intolerable in that the back had never been trained to bear it. It was not that the Romagnole peasant is especially averse from the business of fighting. By no means so! Call on him to fight for any cause he approves, there and then, on his own plains and hill-sides, and put his wonted weapon, the knife, into his hand, and there could be no reason to complain of his unwillingness to fight. But to submit to strict discipline, to move at word of command, and above all to go away from family, friends, neighbours, from the well-known and well-loved localities and names into a strange land, this was what was intolerable to the imagination of these people.

But was there any prospect of probability that the Romagnole conscript would be sent forth on foreign service? Was it not for the defence of his native land, for service on Italian ground, that he was needed? Such considerations were urged on the young men of Romagna in vain. Native land! Their native land was Romagna,—

the flank of the Apennine, the banks of the Metauro, the shore of the Adriatic, the fat soil and fertile fields which make their district the granary of Italy. To their imagination Piedmont was as much a foreign country as France, or as China! A country the ways and manners, and, above all, the language of which, were utterly and distastefully different from their own.

To be seized and forcibly sent away from his home, from his interests, from his loves, from his habitudes, into an unknown and distant land, where the people were hard and unfriendly by nature (the constant prejudice of Italian provincialism against the inhabitants of other districts), where they talked an unintelligible and disgusting gibberish, where they made bad bread, and grew intolerable wine, and the girls were all ugly, and not kind like the dear ones of their own genial land, this was what the Romagnole youths, especially those of the rural districts, could not make up their minds to endure.

Great, accordingly, was the amount of discontent and trouble occasioned by the inevitable enforcement of the conscription in these districts, and very numerous were the *refrattarij* or run-aways, who "took to the hills" rather than submit to the fate which an unlucky number at the drawing of the dreaded conscription had awarded them.

And the natural peculiarities and conformation of their country afforded especial facilities for such means of escape. The fertile low-lands of Romagna are but a narrow strip shut in between the sea and the mountains. The latter are nowhere far off—nowhere beyond the reach of one day's journey on foot. And these mountains represent not only a physical but a political barrier; a frontier which, in the case of the late ill-regulated and ill-agreeing governments of Italy, always involved an extra degree of lawlessness in the habits of the people. The Apennine frontier line between Tuscany and the Papal provinces of the Bolognese and Romagna was always, especially on the Papal side, a district notorious for evil deeds and lawless violence of all kinds. And

although the great majority of the Romagnole conscripts, who took to the hills to escape from military service, were for the most part very honest, and in some cases well-to-do country bumpkins, who contemplated no other breach of the law than simple escape from the conscription, yet resistance to the law, and the manner of life to which it necessarily leads, are not good training-schools for the civic virtues. Between breakers of the law, whatever may be the nature of the difference which puts them at odds with it, there is a fellowship and a community of interests which is apt fatally to widen the breach between the law and those whose quarrel with it is of the lesser gravity.

All which, of course, made the disorders arising from the dread of the conscription, prevailing specially among the rustic populations of Romagna, so much the more mischievous and deplorable, and ought to have prevented the ministers of religion, who understood the nature of the case perfectly in all its bearings, from manifesting their political hostility to the Italian government by contributing to place the young men of their parishes in positions of so much moral danger.

Yet the clergy were everywhere the agents of and inciters to desertion.

Did a Romish clergy ever yet hesitate to sacrifice morality to a political object? Their own reply would be, that they never do so because the political objects which they have at heart are, in fact, essential to the good morality of generations yet unborn, and that whatever sacrifice may be made of the moral good of present units is justified and compensated by the advantage gained for future thousands; not to mention that the moral harm done in the meantime can all be put right by a stroke of their own art!

Throughout the Romagna, accordingly, during those first years that followed the incorporation of that province with the new Italian kingdom, wherever a conscript wished to abscond instead of joining the *dépôt*, his parish priest was ready to aid and abet his flight; and

whenever his courage failed to take that step, or his good feeling towards the new order of things struggled against the temptation to take it, the priest was at hand to suggest, to counsel, to persuade, to urge it. Had it not been for the clergy, the evil would have been easily eradicated; and the state of things in the Romagna, which gave rise to the events related in the following pages, would not have existed.

CHAPTER II.

BELLA LUCE.

THE flat strip of rich alluvial soil at the foot of the hills, and on the sea-shore, which makes the wealth and prosperity of the province of Romagna, is not specially interesting in other than agricultural eyes, save for its numerous and storied cities. The higher Apennine range, which hedges in this district from the rest of the peninsula, is a bleak and barren region for the most part, from which its clothing of forest has, to the great injury of the country in many respects, been stripped in the course of many greedily consuming and improvidently unproducing generations. This rugged backbone of Italy is not devoid in many parts of points of interest and beauty of the wilder and sterner kind; but it cannot be compared, at least in this section of it, with the mountain scenery of either the Alps, the Pyrenees, or even the Jura. But between these two regions there is a third, which teems with beauty and interest of no mean order.

The great massive flanks of the mountains are there broken by an innumerable multitude of small streams into a labyrinth of little valleys—a world of bosky

greenery, of sunny meadows on the uplands, of rich fat pastures in the watered bottoms, of woodlands on the swelling hill-sides. Less valuable as a grain-producing country than the alluvial district along the shore, it is hardly less smiling to the eye of the husbandman; it is far more varied in the nature of its products, and infinitely more beautiful. From many a snug homestead deep-niched in the hollow of some dark-green valley, a peep of the restless Adriatic, tumbling itself into white-crested breakers flashing in the southern sun, is seen across the sea-side plains, through the valley's mouth, like the section of a landscape through a telescope. Many a time the storm-wind is sweeping down from the wilderness of the upper Apennine, and teasing the Hadrian sea into meriting its Horatian epithet, "iracundus," while the sheltered nooks among the lower hills, though they can hear the distant tempests far above them, and can see the working of it on the face of the sea far beneath them, feel nothing of it.

It is not wonderful, that the inhabitants and tillers of this favoured region should love it, and be loth to quit it; for it is in truth a lovely home,—a smiling, grateful, genial, and beautiful country.

In one of the most beautiful parts of this beautiful region, a little to the south-west of the small sea-side town of Fano, and a little to the north-west of Ancona, there is among the hills a farm and farm-house called Bella Luce. "Beautiful light" is the translation of the name; and whether a stranger visited it when the first rays of the sun, rising out of the Adriatic, were smiling their morning greeting to it, laughingly peering round the wood-clothed shoulder of the hill, which shuts in the entrance to the valley on the southern side of it; or whether he saw it at the Ave Maria hour, when from the cool obscurity of its green nook it looked on the last reflected beams playing with a fitful and fading smile on the darkening waters, the perfect propriety of the appellation would hardly be questioned by him.

The little stream, which in the course of ages had

hollowed out for itself from the friable side of the Apennine the narrow valley, in which the house and a great part of the farm of Bella Luce are situated, runs into the river Metauro from the north. It falls into the river, that is to say on its northern side. But as the large valley of the Metauro runs towards the Adriatic not in an easterly, but in a north-easterly direction, and as the small valley opens into the larger one not at right angles, but sloping in a direction from the west, it commanded the peep that has been described of the distant sea.

The farm-house was situated about half-way up the sloping side of the valley, the declivity of which was so shaped that the part above the dwelling was very much less steep than that below it. Immediately in front of the house, which was so placed as to look down the valley, the ground fell away in a descent as steep as it well could be without depriving the soil of its character of a pasturage. Had it been steeper, the sod must have been broken by the rains, which are often very violent in this region, and the valley-side would have assumed the character of a precipice. As it was, it was a rich, deeply green, buttercup-mottled pasture. Above and behind the house, where the declivity was, as has been said, very much less rapid, there was a small quantity of arable land and a wider extent of wood. Along the sides of the valley below the farm residence—towards the opening of it, that is to say—there were several fields mainly of root-crops; but the upper part of the valley, beyond the house, was almost entirely occupied by pasture-land.

All this constituted a large farm, as the farms run in that part of the world, and a rich and valuable one. And Paolo Vanni, the farmer, was a rich and prosperous man—not so rich and prosperous as an Englishman might have imagined, if the long frontage of the farm-house had been pointed out to him from the opposite side of the valley, but richer and more prosperous than the same stranger would have supposed if he had formed his estimate from a near examination of the dwelling. In the first case, the imposing length of the frontage, and the quantity of the

masses of building attached to it, would have led the Englishman to imagine that none save a man living in a house with considerable pretensions to something more than mere comfort, and carrying on his agricultural operations with a *luxé* of appurtenances and out-buildings of all sorts, could be in the occupation of premises making so great a show. In the second case, he would have marvelled at the quantity of brick and mortar apparently wasted, and would have concluded that only a man whose affairs were going to the bad could be the master of so unrepaired, so untidy, so ramshackle, so poorly-furnished a residence.

Neither conjecture would have hit the truth. Paolo Vanni was of the race of well-to-do peasants—a very common race in the rich and fertile province of Romagna. He was neither better instructed, nor more industrious, nor more enlightened, than any of the peasant farmers of the district, nor different in his manners and ideas from them. But he held a very good farm—his father and grandfather had held it before him—and he was very fond of saving his money.

The strikingly long front of the building, which makes so magnificent a show from the further side of the valley, resolves itself into elements which have very little of the magnificent about them when seen close at hand. One very large portion of the frontage consisted of an open *loggia*. The *loggia* at Bella Luce occupied one end of the façade of the building, and consisted of a space enclosed by three solid brick walls, and in front by a range of five arches resting on red brick pilasters. In that one of the three walls which formed the partition between the *loggia* and the rest of the house there was a door of communication, which by the aid of two stone steps projecting into the space enclosed, gave access from the latter to the kitchen of the house.

Most of the *case coloniche*, or farm-houses, in this part of the country have an open *loggia* of this sort, half cart-shed, half stable, partly poultry-house, and partly family sitting-room. And much pleasanter and whole-

somer sitting-rooms such *loggie* are in the fine weather, despite the heterogencous uses which they are required to serve, than the almost always dark, close, and blackened kitchens. There, in the summer evenings, the cradle is brought out and the wife plies her distaff, while the father of the family, and the son, or the grandfather, or a brother, or a wife's brother—for these rural families are generally composite, and consist of more members than a single couple and their children—are husking a heap of maize, shot down in a corner, or busy in some other such task of rural economy. Or, quite as probably, the male members of the family are smoking their cigars, and enjoying the dear delights of chat and *dolce far niente*.

In contradistinction to the ways of some other districts, the rural habitations of this hill country seem almost always to have been selected with some regard to prospect. Perhaps other more material considerations than the pleasure of the eye may have presided over the selection; but the fact is, that most of these hill farm-houses are so placed that the front commands—as was eminently the case at Bella Luce—a view of more or less extent and beauty. And to a stranger, if possibly not consciously to the inhabitants themselves, a charm is added, which makes some of these picturesquely arched *loggie*,—especially when, as is often the case, a vine is trained around the columns and over the arches,—most agreeable and enticing tempters to an hour of *far niente*.

A large kitchen; a huge room next to it, that served in part as a sleeping-room for a portion of the male inhabitants of the farm, and in part for a store-room for grain; another still larger building used principally as a wood-house, and beyond that a stable for those important members of an Italian *contadino's* family, the oxen, made up the rest of the long façade. But in order to appreciate justly the entire extent of this frontage, it must be in mind that each one of all these rooms and buildings was at least twice as large as any Englishman would deem requisite for their respective purposes.

Over the *loggia* there were three good-sized sleeping

chambers, two of them, however, accessible only by passing through that nearest to the rest of the house, and the furthest only by passing through both of those which preceded it. It would have been perfectly easy to arrange the two latter in such sort as to have rendered them both accessible from the first. But no such modification had struck the architect, or any of those who had to use his handiwork, as either necessary or desirable.

Over the huge kitchen was an equally large room, intended apparently, as far as might be judged from the nature of its furniture, as the eating-room of the family. And it was used as such on high days and holidays, and other great occasions, whether the farmer's family had guests on such occasions or not. It was to the solemnity of the occasion, and not to the guests, that the respect manifested by the use of this state-chamber was paid. When no such great occasion was to the fore, the great room over the kitchen remained empty of all save its long table and massive benches, and vile French coloured lithographs around the bare yellow-washed walls. Above this room was a garret, which served the purpose of a dove-cote. It was the only part of the building that had a second story; and the difference in height thus occasioned broke the outline of the building, as seen from the outside, in a manner very favourable to the picturesqueness of its appearance.

Over the large noudescript room on the other side of the kitchen was a huge chamber, the two windows of which were unglazed, and closable only by heavy, massive, brown-red shutters opening on the outside. It was unceiled also, and the bare rafters were inhabited and draped by a family of spiders of very ancient lineage. The principal use for which it served was that of a deposit for grain, and at certain periods of the year for various fruits, which were spread out on its wide floor to dry. But there was a bed in one corner, which in very bad weather might appear to some persons a more desirable place of repose than the green hill-side, on which the windows looked.

The other two component parts of the long façade, the wood-house, that is to say, and the stable for the draught-oxen, had no buildings over them ; and the few chambers which have been mentioned, together with a staircase, which seemed to have been constructed with a view of ascertaining how much space a staircase could be made to occupy, constituted the entirety of the large house, with the exception of certain annexes at the back, which were devoted to divers purposes varying in dignity from that of a back kitchen to that of a pigstye.

It will be understood from the foregoing account, that, notwithstanding the imposing appearance made by Bella Luce when seen from a distance, any tolerably comfortable English farmer lives with a much greater degree of house comfort and convenience than Paolo Vanni. With the one exception of space, every point of comparison would be very much in favour of the Englishman. But ample space is an important element in a dwelling, especially in a southern climate.

But of all the appurtenances and appendages which the English farmer possesses, and the Italian farmer does not possess, that of which the Englishman would least tolerate the absence, and the presence of which would be least cared for by the Italian, would be a garden. On that charmingly sheltered hill-side in front of the house, on that magnificent terrace on either side of it, situations that seem calculated to inspire the idea of creating a little Paradise, if it had never occurred to any man before, no inhabitant of Bella Luce has ever dreamed of creating anything of the kind. Profit has been neglected, as well as pleasure, in this direction. There are no more onions than roses. Strawberries have been as little thought of as gilly-flowers ! There is an old fig-tree near one corner of the house ; and there is a grape-vine trained over the pilasters and walls of the *loggia*. There may be also a patch of potatoes among other farm crops, and certainly there will be a crop of some kind of beans, which will contribute to the sustenance of the Bella Luce family. But that is all. Nothing is more a matter of

surprise to an Englishman in Italy, than to find houses and townlets in the country unable to produce a morsel of fruit or vegetable,—sometimes not even a potato.

Another large department of rural comforts and luxuries was almost as much neglected at Bella Luce as the horticultural. Cheese was the only form of dairy produce used or cared for by the inmates. They made no butter, and drank no milk, giving to the pigs all that was not converted into cheese.

The Scriptural and classical catalogue, in short, of the oriental cultivator's needs and desires, pretty nearly completed those of Paolo Vanni and his family. Corn, wine, and oil were the main articles on which they subsisted. Meat in no very large proportion, and eggs in somewhat greater abundance, may be added, it is true. And certain moderate supplies of coffee and sugar were brought from neighbouring Fano,—sufficient to give the male heads of the family a little cup of muddy black coffee after their dinner on high days and holidays. The women took none; and the men took it rather as a symbol of feasting and luxury, than because they cared anything about it.

For all that Paolo Vanni was a warm man,—quite warm enough to have bought up many an English small farmer, who would have most amazingly turned up his nose at the Romagnole farmer's mode of life.

As for the question, however, which of the two,—the English farmer, or the Romagnole agriculturist,—lived the happier life, and got the greatest amount of satisfaction out of it,—why, that would probably have little to do with the absence or the presence of all that the Englishman could so ill do without; but rather upon matters of a more intimately personal nature;—with some of which, as regards Paolo Vanni, it is time that the reader should be made acquainted.

CHAPTER III.

DOMESTIC POLITICS.

PAOLO VANNI, to tell the plain truth at once, was not a happy man, very far from it. And the real cause of his discomfort was in fact that "warmness" which has been spoken of. Yet old Paolo was continually laying up treasure where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt. The carefully kept account of the amounts that he had from time to time invested in this way, all duly paid over to Heaven's appointed stewards here below, and regularly acknowledged, showed really very considerable investments in that absolutely safe stock. Yet somehow or other the promised satisfaction of mind did not follow from the operation. Perhaps it was that he laid up still larger treasures in the store-houses where moth and rust *do* corrupt and where thieves do break in and steal. But neither the moth nor the rust could much damage old Paolo Vanni's treasure, for it consisted in hard silver dollars ; and no thief had ever broken in or stolen from him as yet. It is true, however, that he did strive very pertinaciously to serve two masters. His spiritual guide assured him that this was not only possible, but very easy to be

done ; easy at least for him, who had the means to do it. For curiously enough, according to the teaching of Don Evandro Baluffi, the *curato* of Santa Lucia, the more successfully you served Mammon, the more satisfactorily you were enabled thereby to serve God. How was a man to found a perpetual mass, with music and tapers of the larger size—or even without these luxuries, for that matter—if he had not paid sufficient court to Mammon to secure the means of paying for it?

Perhaps, however, it is all a matter of proportion. Perhaps Paolo Vanni did not insure highly enough, for he looked on the treasure laid up in purchasing masses and such like, in the light of money paid for insurance ; not exactly against the moth and the rust, or against thieves, but against certain other contingencies that he had somehow or other learned—assuredly not from Don Evandro !—to fancy might attend the possession of wealth.

Notwithstanding, however, the kind and constant encouragement of that judicious spiritual guide, philosopher, and friend, and the undeviating payment of this insurance money in many forms, poor old Paolo Vanni, despite his wealth, despite his thriving and prosperous farm, despite his hale and vigorous old age, was not contented or happy. I take it there must have been some importunate voice, though no one of those about him ever overheard it, which must have been constantly earwigging him with doubts and disagreeable suggestions, of a kind quite opposed to the consolatory assurances of the good Don Evandro. But surely this “voice,” whatever it was, could not have incarnated itself, or rather investmented itself, in a triangular beaver, snuffy black waistcoat, long-tailed surtout coat, shiny black camlet shorts, black worsted stockings, and thick, low-cut shoes, with big plated buckles on them ! Surely it did not come out of any tonsured head on which the episcopal hand had ever rested in ordination. Surely it was not the voice of any teacher duly appointed, authorised, or guaranteed by the Church ; and therefore ought not to have been listened to

for a moment in opposition to Don Evandro, who spoke with all the authority that these things could impart? Nevertheless so it was, that old Paolo Vanni, though his sixty odd years sate as lightly on him as sixty years could well sit, though his six feet of height was still a good six feet, undiminished by droop or stoop; and though he could not be said to have been what is usually phrased "unhappy in his family," was a discontented and querulous old man.

There were, however, other causes besides the presence of that importunate voice which I have conjectured might have annoyed him, causes connected with the Bella Luce family politics, which no doubt contributed to this result.

With Assunta Vanni, his old wife, he certainly had no cause to be discontented. Assunta, the sister of a farmer holding a much poorer farm than that of Bella Luce, higher up and further back among the hills, had been a beauty, very tall like her husband, who had also been a remarkably handsome man. This, however, is of less account in a country where beauty, especially of figure and person, is the rule rather than the exception, than it might be considered elsewhere. Sunta had been a good wife, an excellent helpmeet, a thrifty housewife, and had borne her husband two children, both boys. What could a wife do more to merit the admiration of a Romagnole farmer husband? Moreover Sunta had the highest possible reverence for her lord and master, and looked on his will as law beyond appeal. If ever they had any difference of opinion, it was that whereas Paolo always wished to retain the savings of the year in the shape of hard cash—*scudi sonanti*,* as the expressive popular Italian phrase has it,—Sunta would fain have hoarded them in the shape of additions to her already uselessly abundant store of house linen. The difference had years ago been arranged on the understanding that all that could be made or saved by the assiduous labour of the

* Sounding crowns.

females of the family in turning flax into yarn, should go to increase the store in Signora Vanni's presses; always on the understanding—a point which had given rise to a slight contest, in which Paolo had been easily victorious,—that Santa should herself pay for the weaving of her yarn in the neighbouring town out of the proceeds of it.

The labour of the females of the family, I have said; and have nevertheless mentioned that Santa Vanni was the mother of two sons only. And doubtless the English reader pictures to himself Dame Vanni in the similitude of Dame Durden, who, as the rustic old stave says, “kept five serving maids.” But this would be an error. Italian farmers, with the exception of a few in a larger way of business than Paolo Vanni, of Bella Luce, do not in that part of Italy use any labour on their farms save that of the members of their family. A large family is held to be a sign and means of thriving. But it must be a family in the strict sense of the word, connected by blood, and not merely by the tie between the employer and the employed. Whose, then, were the other fingers besides Dame Vanni's own which assisted in twirling these ceaseless Bella Luce spindles, and contributed to the accumulation of sheeting and table-cloths as little intended to be ever used as such, as the *rarissimi* of a bibliomania's library to be read? Whose were those active fingers?

They belonged to Giulia Vanni; and were among the very few things that Giulia Vanni could call her own. Giulia was the orphan child of a distant cousin of Paolo, who was nevertheless his nearest relative. Paolo was, I think, hardly the man, at his period of life, to charge himself willingly with the support and care of other people's children. But in the first place it must be understood that public opinion, and even the exigencies of the law, are much more stringent upon such points in Italy, than they are with us. A nephew, who is capable of doing so, may be compelled by law to support his uncle by the father's side—(not so his mother's brother)—

and public opinion would extend the claims of kinship very much further. To a mediæval Italian, it was quite a matter of course that a brother, a son, a father, or even a cousin, should suffer death for his relative's political or other crime; and this strong solidarity of all the members of one house has left deep traces in the manners and sentiments of the people to the present day. Paolo Vanni may have therefore felt, that he could not, without risking a degree of opprobrium that he was not prepared to face, refuse to take this little orphan cousin, far away cousin though she was, to his home.

But in the next place there are strong grounds for thinking that Giulio Vanni, the father of little Giulia, though a poor man was not altogether a destitute one. He must, people thought, have left some little property behind him. But Paolo Vanni, who was with him during his last illness and at the time of his death, and who naturally had the management of whatever small matters there were to manage, showed that, when all was paid, there was nothing left; that Giulia was wholly unprovided for; that there was nothing for it but for him to show his charity by supporting and bringing her up. I believe that if all the yarn those rosy taper fingers had twiddled off that eternal distaff had been fairly sold in Ancona, the proceeds would have paid the cost of Giulia's keep. I have a strong idea, too,—to speak out plainly, and shame that old thief against whose machinations Paolo Vanni was always paying insurance money,—that if that troublesome voice, which has been mentioned as bothering the wealthy farmer, could have been overheard, one might have learnt some curious particulars about the executorship accounts of Giulio Vanni. Don Evandro, at all events, must have known all about it . . . *sub sigillo confessionis* . . . for Paolo was a very religious man.

All these matters, however, were bygones, and altogether beside the present purpose. Whether Giulia Vanni had ever been entitled to any modicum of this world's goods or not, she clearly possessed none *now*,—at

the time, that is, to which the singular events to be related in the following pages refer,—some year or so before the present time of writing. It will be more to the purpose to tell the reader what Giulia at that time *had*.

She had eighteen years; and all the knowledge, experience, wisdom, health, and talents that could be gathered in that space of time on the slope of an Apennine valley; and not altogether such a bad dower either, as some of the more tocher'd lasses of the cities either on the northern or the southern side of the Alps may perhaps be disposed to imagine. Imprimis, there was a figure five feet seven inches in height; lithe, springy, light, agile as that of a mountain goat; a step like a fawn's, and a carriage of the pretty small head to match; a fair broad brow, not very lofty, but giving unmistakable promise of energy of character and good practical working intelligence; above it a wonderful profusion of raven black hair, not very fine, but glossy as the raven's wing, and falling on either side from the parting at the top of the head in natural ripples, on which the sunbeams played in a thousand hide-and-seek effects of light and shade; well-opened large black eyes, frank and courageous, with a whole legion of wicked laughing imps dancing and flashing about like fire-flies in the depths of them; a little delicately formed *nez retroussé*, which very plainly said "beware" to such as had the gift of interpreting nature's code of signals; a large but exquisitely formed mouth, the favourite trysting-place of smiles and innocent waggeries, the home of irresistible sweetness,—a mouth that bade him, or even her, who looked on it, pay no heed to the warning conveyed by neighbour nose, but, on the contrary, place boundless trust and confidence in the proprietress of it, —a mouth whose signals every human thing with eyes in its head could read, whereas only cynically philosophic physiognomists, who had burned their fingers, or at least their hearts, by former investigations of similar phenomena, could understand what that queer little nose

said. It cannot perhaps be fairly asserted that all these good things were wholly the gift of old Apennine; but the splendid colouring,—a study for Giorgionne!—the rich, clear brown cheek, with a hue of the sun's own painting, like that which he puts, when he most delicately touches it, on an October peach!—that was Apennine's own present to his daughter! For the rest, the mountain women said that Giulia Vanni was too slight to be good for anything—a mere wisp! The mountain men said that she was as beautifully made as any lady of the cities. The town women said that her waist was thick and clumsy. The town men when they saw her, thought slender waists a mistake. Phidias would have said that she was the incarnation of his *beau idéal*.

In short, no lovelier nut-brown maid ever stepped a hill-side than Giulia Vanni, as she was at eighteen years of age! That warning nose might hang out what signals it pleased, and that host of laughing devils in her eyes might mockingly bid you take care, every time your glance met hers;—it was all in vain! The male creature under thirty that looked on Giulia Vanni fell in love with her! And how well she knew her power! And how she enjoyed her royalty! And what pleasant fun she found it to scatter her fire-darts around, herself scatheless and invulnerable the while, the cruel Diana that she was.

But if it was impossible to look on the brilliant, flashing, dangerous creature for an instant without receiving a wound from her eyes, what must have been the lot of poor Beppo Vanni, the eldest of Santa's two sons! Poor Beppo, who had to live in the same house with her, to grow up with her, to share his work with her, to play with her, and laugh with her, to have little household secrets with her, to be her slave and work for wages in smiles not unpunctually paid—what could become of him? What, but to worship the very ground she trod on, and look to the hope of winning her as the lode-star of his life!

Winning her, quotha !—a pretty winning, old Paolo and old Sunta considered it ! *Winning* a wife without so much as a pearl necklace to begin the world with ! And he, Beppo Vanni, heir to the lease of Bella Luce and—nobody knew, not even Dame Sunta—how many thousands of *scudi* besides. Not if they knew it ! The sly puss might see what she could win for herself ; but it would not be Beppo Vanni—no, nor even Carlo Vanni, his younger brother.

And thus it appears what else there was, besides those suspected small-voiced importunities which have been hinted at, to make old Paolo Vanni querulous and discontented. Besides, it was not only that his son and heir was bent on making a fool of himself by marrying a girl without a *bajocco* ; but he would not make a match which his father was very anxious to secure for him. Don Evandro, like a true friend of the family, had proposed the thing in the first instance, and would doubtless have managed the whole affair with that tact and success which the Italian clergy are so remarkable for in such matters if only Beppo would have been reasonable. But, to his father's intense annoyance, he would not ; having been bewitched and rendered wholly unreasonable by the "laughing devils" in Giulia's eyes. Don Evandro had tried to exorcise them once, summoning Giulia to an interview in the sacristy for that purpose. But it was clear from the result that he did not succeed ; and he never tried a second time !

To Beppo himself it was really a question—could he win her ? And a very dubious question too. It was not that he was not perfectly well aware of the advantages of his social position. He knew all that was due to the presumed future tenant of Bella Luce. He knew that his father was the richest man in the parish of Santa Lucia, and in the neighbouring parishes around it (putting the owners of the soil who lived in the cities, and of whom the cultivators of the soil saw little, out of the question ; as of course they *were* out of the question) ; he knew that he was presumably his father's heir ; and he was quite

as well aware as any Romagnole peasant of the value of money and the social position it commands—which is equivalent to saying, he was as well aware as anybody in the world. But for all that it was an anxious question with him—could he hope to win her? He knew that she had absolutely nothing; that she was maintained by his father's charity; and for all that it was with him a very anxious question whether he could win Giulia Vanni for his wife or no.

And Giulia herself? What was her view of the matter? Her public conduct in the little world of Bella Luce, and her private feeling? Well, the last perhaps is hardly a fair question. Perhaps Giulia would herself scarcely have been able to answer it consistently and entirely, even if her own heart were the asker. I suspect that her own heart never had categorically asked of her that question up to the time in question. Of course the writer has a means of forming some notion as to the real state of her feelings at that period—a clearer one perhaps than she could have formed herself—because he has the knowledge of her subsequent conduct to guide him to an appreciation of them. And it will probably be best to let the reader arrive at a knowledge of the secrets of her inmost heart in the same manner. As to her visible behaviour in the little Bella Luce world, little, it must be admitted, can be said in defence of it, beyond what Beppo always said, appearing to consider that it was an abundantly ample answer to all possible fault-finding.

"But she is so beautiful!" he would say; "she is so beautiful!"

So she was! But that did not justify her in wearing an honest man's heart to fiddle-strings! spoiling his rest, destroying his appetite for supper, and keeping him awake o' nights. And really, if it had been the settled purpose of her life to do all these cruel things, she could not have set about it in a more workwoman-like manner. Did you ever observe a kitten rub its nose and cheek against a person's hand, purring in the most insinuatingly flattering manner all the while, and then start away with

a sudden bound, rush under a neighbouring chair, and then put up its little back and spit? Well, this was exactly the type of Giulia's manner to Beppo! There was never anything of *tenderness*,—no symptom of love,—such love as Beppo wanted,—to be detected in her manner, in her looks, in the tone of her voice. But she would be so good, so kind, so frankly affectionate, that he would be tempted either by eye or voice to some manifestation of the passion that was consuming him. No sooner had he done so than she was off like a startled fawn, and either avoided him, or was cross to him for the rest of the day.

There was one sign only that might perhaps have led an intelligent looker-on at the game to hope that there might be something better in store for poor Beppo, though it altogether failed to assure or comfort him. This was the way in which Giulia would behave when others attacked, or slighted, or be-littled Beppo; especially when his brother, who was about two years his junior, and just Giulia's own age, did so, as was not unfrequently the case. Then, indeed, it was clear enough that Beppo had a *friend*, if nothing else, in his beautiful cousin! And surely it ought to have led him to see a thing or two! Only Beppo was not the man to see anything that anybody tried to hide from him. Besides, it was more generally in his absence that Giulia would make a sortie, like a tigress from a jungle in defence of her young, in Beppo's behalf. And Carlo would get a scratch from the claw that he did not forget as soon as he ought to have done. And then old Paolo or Dame Sunta would sneer and say something disagreeable if they were present; and Giulia would be as cross and scratchy as possible to Beppo afterwards.

This younger brother, Carlo, was by no means a lad of whose allegiance most pretty girls would have been otherwise than proud. He was, though not so tall as his brother, who was slightly taller than his father—and *he* was over six feet in his stockings,—nevertheless, like most of the Romagnole peasantry, a very fine young man.

He was of a lighter build altogether than his brother, somewhat darker in hair and eyes, and of a less jovially ruddy brown complexion. Beppo would have been deemed probably the handsomer specimen of manhood by a jury of girls (delivering a secret verdict to a female judge) taken from the fields and hill-sides. Carlo might perhaps have had the verdict from a similar jury chosen from a city population. Then he was cleverer than Beppo, or at least was held to be so by all the world in which they both lived, including Don Evandro, and both Beppo and Carlo themselves. Beppo considered Carlo as a quite unprecedented (at least in those parts) prodigy of genius. And Carlo, if not quite persuaded of the justice of that opinion, was thoroughly convinced that his brother was a brainless lout, while he himself was a very clever fellow.

He was the cleverer of the two certainly. His intelligence was the readier and nimbler. He was the better scholar, wrote a better hand, and was infinitely quicker at accounts, or calculations. But Beppo, though slow, was no fool; and there are many subjects—and those not amongst the least important that human hearts and heads are called upon to decide for themselves—respecting which—give him time to bring his mind to bear upon the point—I would far rather have bound myself to be ruled by Beppo's than by Carlo's judgment. And then one was always sure to know what Beppo really did think and feel. And I am not so clear of that in the case of master Carlo.

Perhaps old Paolo and Sunta might have made up their minds to allow young Carlo and Giulia to come together if only she would have kept her hands off the sacred person of Beppo, their first-born. It is too bad to use such language! As if Giulia showed any sign of wanting to . . . I think I can see how her eye would flash, and all those laughing devils in it we talked of would turn to fire-darting furies, if the phrase were used in her presence. But that was the thought of the old couple upon the subject. And though I don't think either

of them would have dared to say as much in crude words in Giulia's hearing, I have little doubt that she had to brook many a sneer and insinuation of the sort from them,—to be rebutted by cruel treatment from her towards poor Beppo, and I strongly suspect, to be followed by midnight hours of weeping, and bursts of passionate agony, of which laughing, flashing, proud, scornful Giulia's pillow was the only witness.

I think, as has been said, that Giulia might have had Carlo Vanni if she would. But though there were symptoms enough that he would have been well pleased to settle all the family disagreements in that manner, it was very clear that Giulia would have nothing to say to any such arrangement.

Clever, sharp Carlo, with his handsome dark eye, his locks as black as her own, his fine long Grecian nose, and light *svelte* figure, did not suit her taste. Was it really true that she liked heavy, good-natured Beppo, with his honest dark-blue eyes, and curly dark-brown hair, and Herculean shoulders, at all better? Old Paolo would have sneered bitterly in reply, that Giulia knew which side of the bread the butter was, none better! Young Beppo would have almost as bitterly answered, that she cared as much about him as she did about the oxen in the stable!

In fact, he often did say so; for it was a favourite comparison of himself in poor Beppo's mouth.

"I don't remember ever to have seen cousin Giulia steal away into the fields to help the oxen at their work, the way she went off t'other night to help you, Beppo, with shucking that lot of *gran-turco** in the loft," said Carlo once, viciously, for his father and mother were present.

"Because the *gran-turco* would never have been finished that night, if I hadn't given a hand; for Beppo was so sleepy he could not hold his stupid head up!" replied Giulia, colouring up and tossing her head.

* The common country name for maize in Italy—"Turkish grain."

"And wouldn't she do as much or more for you, or for *babbo*,* or for old Cecco, the blind beggarman, or for the oxen either, for that matter? Would she not do anything on earth she could for any living creature?" demanded Beppo, with immense energy. "But for me more than another," he added, with bitterness, "no! You know better than that, Carlo!"

But what would most have tended to make all straight and comfortable at Bella Luce, would have been that Beppo should have made up his mind to the match which his father and his parish priest had picked out for him. And there was really very little reason why he should not do so;—very little reason, that is to say, except those mischief-making eyes of cousin Giulia;—and the natural and notorious perversity of Dan Cupid, who really can only be led or driven by parents and guardians on the same principle on which Paddy is said to have succeeded in driving his pig from Cork to Dublin,—“by making the cratur think it's from Dublin to Cork that I'm wanting him to go!”

If cousin Giulia had been out of the question, really Beppo might have done worse than make up to Lisa Bartoldi, the rich Fano attorney's only daughter; as his father, and Don Evandro, and Lisa's father, old Sandro Bartoldi, wished him to do.

Ay, if cousin Giulia were out of the question; as she would have been if Paolo Vanni had never taken her to live at Bella Luce.

“See what comes of doing a charitable action, and sacrificing one's own interest to one's goodness of heart! It's always the way!” said old Paolo Vanni one day, in talking the grievance over with his guide, philosopher, and friend, Don Evandro.

The priest did not answer him save by a steady and meaning look right into the old man's eyes; the full translation and meaning of which I take to have been, that that able divine and confessor wished to intimate

* Daddy, the common phrase with Italians of all classes.

that his view of the circumstances in question placed that bringing home of the orphan cousin on the debtor, and not at all on the creditor, side of that double-entry account between his parishioner and the Recording Angel, which it was his duty to keep properly posted up.

And, after all, it was not so clear that all would have gone upon wheels—as the Italian phrase has it—even if cousin Giulia had never come to Bella Luce. Beppo might possibly have looked kindly on Lisa. But the attorney's daughter was not a bit more disposed to accept Beppo Vanni for a husband than he was to take her to wife. And *that*, at all events, was not cousin Giulia's fault! And though old Sandro Bartoldi was very desirous that his daughter should marry all Paolo Vanni's hoarded scudi, he was far too doting a father to his motherless girl to have attempted compulsion.

And really Lisa Bartoldi was a very nice girl,—pretty, delicate-featured, golden-haired, blue-eyed, very fragile-looking, and slender. Worse wrong could not have been done her than to place her side by side with Giulia Vanni. It was to make her appear a poor, washed-out, faded, half-alive, wisp of a creature by contrast with that richly developed and magnificent organisation! Her hair was really golden when the sun lent a little real golden light to tinge it. Her complexion was really charmingly delicate with the faintest possible tint of the blush-rose in the cheek. But by the side of Giulia she seemed to fade into a general whitey-brown atony of colour, like wood-ashes that still glow feebly in the gloom, but fade into lightless grey when the sun's beam touches them. "*Che vuole!*"* as the gossips said. Poor Lisa had been born and had grown up in a very dull house, in a very dull street, in the very dull town of Fano, while Giulia had been drinking, from morning till night, the free fresh air of the breezy Apennine. What chance had Lisa in sleepy stuffy Fano, from which even the sea breeze is shut out by its walls, and by a range of sand-hills still higher than

* "What would you have?" or, "What can you expect?"

they, with a creep to mass in a neighbouring church for her whole dissipation, and a crawl on the *passeggiata** under the lime-trees on festa days for her sole exercise?

Lisa knew, however, a great many things that Giulia did not—necessarily so. Not that, to the best of my judgment, she was in any degree the cleverer girl, or had the more powerful intellect of the two. In the first place, I have a great notion of the truth of the *mens sana in corpore sano*; and, in the next place, there was always a sort of feeble, sickly sentimentalism, a great deal more common on the northern than on the southern side of the Alps—about Lisa, which did not give me the idea of a strongly constituted mind. But, of course, she was by far the more cultivated, had far more pretension to lady-like manners (though it must be understood that there is infinitely less difference in this respect between one woman and another in Italy than among ourselves, the manners of the lower classes being better, and those of the upper strata of society worse, or at least less refined, less educated, and less conventional, than those of the corresponding classes at home) and to refinement. Though, as to lady-like feeling, my own impression is, that Giulia's sentiments, if one could have got at her heart and seen them there *in situ*, instead of coming at them through the medium of her own exposition of them, would be found to be such as might have done honour to any crusader-descended duchess, and set a very useful example to not a few such.

And Lisa Bartoldi was a good girl in her way, too. But dull Herculean Beppo, with the frank, deep blue, steadfast eyes, and the honest, sunburnt, open face, would have nothing to say to her, preferring his nature-created duchess. Not that it ever had entered into his head to compare the two. Compare our Giulia to Lisa Bartoldi! or, indeed, to any other of mortal mould!

No; he *could* have nothing to say to Lisa—nothing to

† Parade, town-walk.

say to her, that is, in the way of love, for they were very good friends, perfectly understood one another, and sympathised upon the subject, and would speak very freely upon it when they met, as was often the case, on occasion of the young farmer of Bella Lucc coming into Fano on market-days.

And indeed they found much to say to each other upon such occasions. For Lisa had a secret of her own—a secret the joint property of herself and a certain captain of Bersaglieri,* one Giacopo Brilli—which she had no objection to trust to great, honest Beppo, in return for his bemoanings of his hapless passion. The exchange was hardly a fair one; for Lisa was happy in her love, and, with a little perseverance, had not much to fear from the rigour of a doting father, who, however, for the present, declared that it was altogether impossible to bestow his heiress daughter on a man who proposed, “no consideration, positively none!” in return. It would be a one-sided and altogether informal contract. Besides, it was no secret that simple Beppo gave in return for Lisa’s confidences. All the world knew his pains! He would bellow out his soft complainings to anyone who would listen to him, pouring out all his great, big, earnest, simple, deeply-smitten heart.

Carlo said once that Beppo reminded him, when the elegiac fit was on him, of one of his own oxen, breathing with outstretched head its melancholy bellowings to the breeze as it went a-field. And if Giulia’s eyes could have wielded daggers as well as look them, when he so spoke, methinks Carlo would never have gibed at his brother or any one else any more.

Farmer Paolo Vanni, and his counsellor Don Evandro, supposing it finally admitted that it was beyond their united power to bring Beppo and Lisa together, would have been glad to secure the Fano attorney’s crowns on behalf of his younger brother, Carlo. And Carlo, despite a certain degree of inclination to make love to his beautiful

* The Rifle Corps.

cousin, half due to real admiration of her beauty, and half to a feeling that it would be very pleasant to carry her off from under his brother's nose, would have had no difficulty in acceding to such an arrangement. But neither in this way did it seem likely, for the reasons that the reader is in possession of, that Sandro Bartoldi's money could be made available for increasing the greatness of the Bella Luce family.

And it is now intelligible, also, why old Paolo Vanni, despite all his worldly prosperity, was not altogether a happy man, and why the Bella Luce household was not an abode of that unbroken felicity, contentment, and peace of mind, which are usually supposed to be the characteristics of dwellings placed in romantic situations, and ten miles from the nearest post-office.

CHAPTER IV.

A GUEST FROM THE CITY.

THE seniors of the party, whose comfortable and reasonable arrangements were all thus disturbed and traversed by Dan Cupid's tricky perversities and self-willed rebelliousness, were not, however, disposed to give up the game without some further attempt at winning it. And matters stood at Bella Luce as has been indicated in the preceding chapter, when shrewd old Sandro Bartoldi, the rich Fano attorney, made a move with a view of weakening the enemy by a diversion. Intent on a scheme he had concocted with this purpose, the attorney ordered his stout, well-fed cob, one fine March morning, for a ride up to Bella Luce. Neither Sandro nor his beast were so well inclined to active movement as they once had been. They took the uphill work easily, therefore, among the lanes that crept up the green valleys; and, though they left Fano betimes in the morning, only reached their destination some half an hour before noon.

That, indeed, was the hour at which the attorney had wished to time his arrival. For his errand required that he should hold a conference with the head of the Bella

Luce family ; and he knew very well that on this precious bright March morning all the males of the place would be at their avocations in the fields. But at noon came the hour of repose, and of the mid-day meal—the hours, rather, for few labourers, either in city or in country, of whatever class, allow themselves, or are allowed by their employers, less than two hours, from twelve till two.

March is a busy month in the country in Italy. It is the time for pruning and dressing the vines. And it was on this work that old Paolo Vanni and his two sons were engaged when Sandro Bartoldi rode up the last steep bit of the hollow lane that climbed from the bottom of the valley to the level of the house.

A French vineyard is one of the ugliest agricultural sights in nature. Nothing can be more unsightly than little low bushes, not much bigger than ugly brown cabbages, set in rows along the fields. But France produces good wine, and declares that this is the only way to do so. For the present, however, Italy is content to drink her somewhat harsher and coarser, but more generous, wines, and to hold to the picturesque old method of cultivation that Virgil has described. Paolo, Beppo, and Carlo Vanni were tending their vines exactly as any Corydon, or Tityrus, or Thyrsis did two thousand years ago on the same hill-sides—marrying them with wedding-knots of withy, not exactly to elms, but to the white mulberry trees. These also had been previously pruned, and the wood and the leaves carefully gathered, till little remained save the trunks, whose office was to support the vines, and a few leading branches cut into a cup-shaped form at the top of the trunk, destined to produce a fresh crop of shoots and leaves from the old, much-scarred pollard head.

The rich, red-tilled land of the large field in which they were all three at work, was now nearly covered with the bright green of the young crop. For the Italian agriculturist, unlike the French, does not think that his field has done enough when it has given him wine ; the same

land must give its corn, too ; and, generally, to make up the Scriptural trio, its oil also.

The father and the two sons were in different parts of the field, at some distance from each other, each engaged on a separate tree. They were all mounted on broad double ladders, some five feet wide at the base, tapering as they rose to a height of about twelve feet or so from the ground, to a width of six or eight inches, and ending in a little platform of those dimensions. The old man was in his shirt-sleeves, and wore short fustian knee-breeches, and bright blue worsted stockings. The two young men wore trousers of cloth ; for Bella Luce was not utterly beyond the limits of fashion's jurisdiction ; though her writs were made returnable thence a considerable time after they were issued. Beppo and Carlo Vanni also had retained their jackets, either in consequence of a falling off from the hardness of the previous generation, or from a sentiment of respect for the presence of the lovely Giulia. Each of the three had a peculiarly shaped small hatchet suspended, save at the moments when it was in use, by a hook at the end of its handle from a strap around his loins, and a bundle of slender osier twigs tied in front of his shoulders ; the first to do the pruning ; the second for the tying of that Virgilian marriage-knot which was to unite the drooping vine firmly to its support till after the vintage.

Giulia was in the field as has been intimated, and was busy in gathering and binding into bundles the prunings, to be carefully carried to the homestead as precious food for the sheep and goats. This duty required her presence under the different trees on which the three men were engaged, one after the other ; and Giulia was very careful to linger no longer over her work under the one tree than under the other. What ! give old Paolo an opportunity of grumbling, or Carlo a chance of sneering, that she sought to make time for saying a few *tête-à-tête* words to poor Beppo ! Not if she were never to have the chance of saying another !

Perhaps ball-room belles fancy that only their lot subjects them to the delicate embarrassments of similar considerations, and that the "happy simplicity of the peasant's life" frees them from all such little troubles. Ah ! Giulia Vanni in the upland farm of Bella Luce could have told them a different story !

However, be scrupulous as she might to gather the vine cuttings under each plant as quickly as she could, and to linger no longer over one part of her work than another, it was impossible to avoid giving each of the three men, in turn, an opportunity of saying a few words to her from the top of his ladder, which was out of ear-shot of the others.

The field in which the party was at work commanded the hollow lane by which the Fano attorney was approaching Bella Luce ; and it so happened that Giulia, who was at that moment gathering up Beppo's cuttings, was the first to catch sight of the guest. "Beppo ! there is a man on horseback coming up the lane ! I declare I think . . . ycs, it certainly is," she added, shading her eyes with her hand, "old Sandro, the attorney at Fano !"

"What can he be coming here for ? . . . no good, you may swear !" said Beppo, who considered the attorney only in the light of one of a conspiracy to deprive him of Giulia.

"Lie, Beppo ! I am sure you ought not to say that of him, of all people in the world ! As if you did not know that he was coming here to propose his daughter for your excellency's acceptance !"

"The apoplexy catch him and his daughter too ! No, poor Lisa ! I don't mean that ! But I wish he would let Lisa go her way, and me mine !"

"What a fine thing it must be to be a rich signore, and to have the girls, pretty ones, too, like Lisa, coming to beg for the honour of your alliance ! But it's cruel to be hard upon her, Beppo ! I would not refuse her, for we poor girls, you know, are apt to break our silly hearts for you ungrateful men."

"Giulia! how can you go on so? As if you did not know! Ah! it's only the girls who break their hearts, I suppose. Well! if you don't know——"

"All I know is, that I must run and tell the *padrone*"—it was so that Giulia always spoke of the master of the family—"that Ser Sandro is coming up the hill! Good-bye, Beppo! Don't be cruel to poor Lisa!"

And off she tripped to the part of the field where Paolo was at work, and from which that part of the hollow lane in which the attorney was riding was not visible.

"'Gnor padrone! There is Ser Sandro, from Fano, coming up the hill! Had I not better run and tell the *padrona*?"

"Ser Sandro coming! where?"

"He is in the hollow of the lane there; I saw him just now."

"Whatever is in the wind to bring him out to Bella Luce to-day of all days in the year?" exclaimed old Paolo.

"Yes, run, my girl, run, and tell *la sposa* that Ser Sandro will take a mouthful of dinner with us!"

Giulia waited for no second bidding, but ran off to the house, to prepare the mistress for the great and unusual event which was impending over Bella Luce, while old Paolo came down from his ladder, and, with his pruning-hatchet still hanging at his loins behind, and his bundle of withy twigs still stuck in front of him, hastened to the edge of the field where it overlooked the hollow way, to greet his visitor as he came up.

"Why, Signor Sandro!" he said from the top of the bank, as the attorney passed below him, "who would have thought of seeing you out at Bella Luce this morning! What news from town? How is the Signora Lisa? Come up, come up! there'll be a mouthful of something or another to eat in the house."

"Eat! Ah! you may talk about eating up here! What a beautiful air you have on the hill-side here. Per bacco, life must be worth fifty per cent. longer purchase here than down in the city there!"

"What time did you start this morning, Signor Sandro?"

"Oh, we've taken it easy, Moro and I. I knew there was no use in getting here before the *angelus*, if I wanted to speak with you, Signor Paolo. How are the vines looking?"

"There is not much to boast of. If we have a glass of wine to drink, it is as much as we shall have."

"Why, they tell me that there are no signs of the disease yet, none even down in the plains; and you are sure to be better off here."

"Wait a bit. It's too soon yet. You'll see in another couple of months. I never cry till I'm out of the wood. The disease will come quite time enough, never you fear. What else can you expect?"

"Expect! why should I expect it? There was much less of it last year than the year before. I expect to have none this year."

"And do you think that is likely, Signor Sandro, with such maledictions as we have in these blessed times? With the beastly, smoking, spluttering railway, that's going to be finished they say this year, is it likely that the air would not be poisoned? There'll be no more crops such as there used to be—you mark my words,—as long as those things are in the country. Why, it stands to reason, they are against nature!"

"I know there are many that consider the vine disease to be caused by the railroad," replied Signor Sandro; "very good judges and competent persons too, ay, and 'sponsible men like yourself, Signor Paolo. So I'm sure it's not for me to say it is not so. Only they do say that the disease is just the same, where there are no railroads."

Chatting thus, the attorney and the farmer approached the house and each other together—the former coming up the road which reached the level of the house and of the field, along the edge of which the latter was walking a few yards only from the door.

Beppo and Carlo had come down from their pruning

ladders, and were following their father at some distance towards the house.

Giulia meanwhile, after communicating her tidings to Signor Sunta, slipped away to her own chamber, to make some little preparation for appearing before the eyes of the townsman. She would not have dreamed of doing anything of the sort for any visitors from any of the neighbouring farms or villages, young or old, male or female. But the Italian peasant has, without much—at all events acknowledged—respect or liking for the city or its inhabitants, a very great awe and admiration for the townsfolk. The peasant considers them to be less honest, less kind, less hearty and healthy, less instructed in all matters really worth knowing, than he himself is. At all events he professes so to consider. But he looks upon the luxury, the *faste*, the pomp, the magnificence, and the finery of the neighbouring city, as something wonderful and stupendous;—affects to reprobate and despise it all, and probably, if an old man, would in reality not change his own life for a city one; but nevertheless looks up to his town-bred neighbours with a very considerable sense of their superior position.

This same feeling, which had sent Giulia off in a hurry to her chamber, manifested itself in *la sposa* in care for the reputation of her kitchen. It was supremely displeasing to her that a stranger from the city should arrive thus unannounced a few minutes only before the dinner hour. If she could have got warning in time, she would have sent into Fano for delicacies of all sorts. If there was no time for that, she would have ransacked the neighbouring villages. But here she was left to make the best figure she could entirely on her own resources. And she had no doubt the townsman thus managed that his visit should be wholly unannounced, for the express purpose of triumphing over her unprovidedness. That he might himself be hungry and like a good dinner, and be pleased at getting one at Bella Luce, never occurred to her as a possible phase of the matter. It shaped itself to her mind as a contest between town and country, in which

the townsman's object would be attained, and his vanity gratified at the expense of hers, in proportion to the poorness of the fare set before him. For to an Italian the gratification of an appetite is a small matter in comparison with the gratification of a vanity.

So *la sposa*, much and deeply grumbling between her teeth, set herself to do all that could be done at so short a notice.

"Carlo," she said to her second son, as he came in from the field, "run quick to his reverence, and tell him to come and take a bit of dinner with us, and ask *la Nunziata* (the priest's housekeeper) to send me a pot of her quince preserve, and some biscuits,—quick."

It must not be supposed that the priest was invited for the sake of the quince sweetmeats and the biscuits. He and they were equally benefactions to her board, and the priest himself by far the most important of the two. It was respectable and in good style, and perhaps even what Signor Sandro himself could not have accomplished at so short a notice, to have the parish priest at the board. His reverence, on his part, it may be observed, hastened to put on his very best coat and a clean collar, not so much from any personal care about, or vanity in such matters, but in order to do honour to Signor Vanni's board, and to support the country in its contest with the city. That was the feeling of the priest, as it would also have been of any of the neighbours. They were all in one boat, so far as the necessity for hiding the nakedness of the land and making the best possible appearance in the eyes of the townsman went.

Meanwhile Sunta did her utmost within the cruelly short space of time which the cunning of the citizen had allowed her. Eggs in abundance were brought in from the poultry-house and stables, and *la sposa* proceeded to concoct a *frittata* with slices of ham cunningly introduced into a stratified formation of egg and flour, fried in abundance of oil, and flavoured with some herbs, according to a special receipt in the possession of Signora Sunta, and which were supposed to be Apennine products unobtain-

able in the towns. Beppo was sent to catch and kill a fowl in all haste, and prepare it for instant spit-cocking. This with a sweet confection, in which more eggs were the principal ingredient, and the *minestra*—the pottage—which would have constituted the entire dinner for the family, if Signor Sandro had stayed at home, made out a tolerably presentable repast, especially when accompanied by an unstinted supply of Signor Vanni's choicest wine, which they all knew was really such as the attorney did not drink every day of his life.

But for all this, be it observed, the Bella Luce family, however anxious to shine in the eyes of their guest, did *not* dream of changing the venue of their repast to the great eating-room upstairs. That would have been too serious and solemn an affair to be thought of for such a mere extemporary matter as the present. The dinners eaten in that state-room *were* dinners indeed! To have placed in the hurriedly prepared modest meal of to-day before their guest in that huge, bare-looking guest-chamber, would have been to render it and themselves ridiculous. So the little party sat down as usual at the table in the kitchen, which was the common living-room of the family.

Giulia stole down from her room, the young men washed their hands and faces, the anxious and hard-working Sunta seized a moment to give one re-ordering touch to her hair and kerchief after her culinary labours, and then announced to her husband, and Don Evandro and Signor Sandro Bartoldi, that "their lordships were served," *i. e.*, in base plebeian terms, that the dinner was ready.

"It's not to be expected," said Signora Sunta, as they sat down, with an *aigre-doux* manner, half mock-modest hospitality, and half self-asserting defiance, "that the like of us can set before a gentleman from the city anything fit for him to eat, and that too at a moment's notice! I'm afraid the soup is not what you can eat, Signor Sandro!"

"On the contrary, my dear madam, I positively must

take the liberty of asking for another ladleful. I was just thinking that I had never tasted a better *minestra* in my life ! ”

“ Ay ! that’s our Bella Luce air ! We can grow appetites up here, if our soil is too poor to grow anything else ! ” said farmer Paolo.

The farm of Bella Luce is anything but poor land ; but an Italian farmer always calls his land poor, and a land-owner as invariably deems it rich.

“ Any way,” said the priest, “ I find that let me bring what appetite I may to Bella Luce, I never take any away with me, and I dare say Signor Sandro will experience the same thing.”

“ That I’ll be sworn I shall ! ” said the attorney.

“ There’s no dinner, to say dinner ! ” replied *la sposa*. “ You are sadly out of luck to-day, Signor Sandro ! This is such a place out here in the mountains. There’s never a bit of meat to be got at Santa Lucia except Saturdays. There’s nothing for your dinner except a grilled fowl of my own fattening, and a Bella Luce *frittata*, and some rashers of our own curing, and a bit of salad ”—the lettuce had been brought by Don Evandro in his handkerchief from his own little bit of garden, and given privately to the *padrona* with many precautions against the detection of the transaction by the guest,—“ and a *dolce*, and some preserve, and a few biscuits ! ”

“ Oh ! oh ! oh ! What a dinner ! What a feast ! ” exclaimed the attorney. “ How you country people do live ! Ah, one must come into the country to know what living means.”

“ But you are not to think, Signor Sandro, that all my parishioners live as they do at Bella Luce,” said the priest. “ *Tutt’ altro lo posso dir io !* * There’s not such another farm as Bella Luce, and not such another manager as *la Signora Sunta*, in all the country-side.”

“ I believe you. Look at this cloth and these napkins,” rejoined the courtier-like attorney. “ I think I know

* Very much otherwise, I can assure you.

whose hands spun the yarn; and I think I could tell, if anybody in Fano asked me, where to find enough of the same make to turn all yonder cornfield as white as this table. Aha! *la sposa*! Am I in the secret, eh? I think I was honoured by a peep into the great press upstairs once upon a time; and I never saw such a show, let the other be where it would!"

This touched the *corde sensible* in *la Signora Santa's* heart, and she was much flattered by the compliment. She smirked and purred, and admitted that, thank God! they were not badly off for linen at Bella Luce; they had enough for the needs of the house, and mayhap a trifle to furnish forth a son's house at need—or maybe a couple of them for the matter of that!

And thereupon Beppo suddenly suspended half-way between the table and his open mouth the huge fragment of bread, with which he had been scouring his plate round and round, in order to mop up the last viscous particles of the *frittata*, and looked hard across the table at Giulia, blushing crimson the while all over his great frank face, as if the most excruciatingly delicate and suggestive thing had been uttered. Giulia, on her part, kept her eyes fixed on her plate, and would have been supposed by anybody, who had never had any daughter of Eve under his observation before, to have been wholly unaware of Beppo's demonstration.

"You don't drink, Signor Sandro! Yet the wine is not so bad as it might be, though I say it that should not," observed old Paolo.

"Per Bacco! I've drunk enough to find out that we townsfolk must not drink it without counting our glasses. *E un gran' vino, davvero! Che colore! Che squisito sapore! E fior di roba!*"* said the attorney, holding his glass up to the light. "We don't drink such wine down in Fano, I can tell you, Signor Paolo!"

"And we don't make such at Bella Luce, now-a-days;

* It's a grand wine, truly! What a colour! What exquisite flavour! It's a very choice article;—literally "flower of goods."

—more's the pity! And never shall again until these cursed railroads are cleared out of the country . . . and something else has happened, that need not be more particularly mentioned," said the old farmer.

Every one present knew very well that this something else meant the restoration of the Papal government. And Signor Sandro Bartoldi thought to himself, that if no more good wine was to be made till that happened, it would be wise to make the most of the old while it lasted. But of course nobody was so un-Italianly imprudent as to take any notice of the farmer's manifestation of his political faith. Don Evandro turned up his eyes towards Heaven, and took advantage of the action to drain his glass; but no word was said.

The railroad, however, was not a tabooed subject, and Beppo ventured, after mature consideration, to say that, if it was true, as he was told, that the vine disease had visited countries where there were no railroads, it did seem to him as if they could not be the cause of it!

"What has that to do with it, *figliuolo mio*?" cried the priest, firing up. "Do you think that the Almighty did not know that those countries were going to make those abominable things against nature, upsetting all society, and sent his curses for their punishment accordingly? Why, there is not one of those countries that you allude to that has not now, as I am informed, fallen into the iniquity. And are not the works of Providence thus justified, and is not the abomination of these nuisances proved past all denial?"

Beppo was too well brought up to dream of arguing with his parish priest. He made no reply; but set himself to consider the question, and soon arrived at the conclusion that he should like to ask Giulia what she thought about it?

Signor Sandro, protesting that he did not presume to judge the matter under its theological aspect, yet ventured to say that, in a wholly worldly point of view, he thought the railway was adding, and would add, to the riches of the country.

The priest answered him that all such wealth would be found to be of the nature of devil's money, and would turn to dust and ashes in the pockets of those who flattered themselves that they were enriched by it.

To this exposition of doctrine the attorney bowed meekly; but thought to himself that, for all that, he should not part with a single one of the shares which were locked up in his strong box at home.

And so the dinner and the conversation went on till *la Signora Sunta* rose and left the table to prepare coffee for the three seniors of the party.

The two young men put cigars in their mouths and strolled out of the kitchen-door, *Beppo* giving a beseechingly inviting glance to *Giulia* to follow him as he went.

Giulia, however, was as blind to this appeal as she had been to the look across the dinner-table, and stealing out of the opposite door of the kitchen, which opened on the huge staircase, tripped up to the privacy of her own room.

CHAPTER V.

SIGNOR SANDRO BARTOLDI.

As soon as the three seniors had been thus left to themselves, sitting over the table, at which they had been dining, and which continued covered with the cloth that had excited Ser Sandro's admiration, the attorney prepared to enter at once on the subject of his visit. The glasses and flasks were still upon the table; and the farmer and the priest replenished theirs yet once again; but the more abstemious townsman, less accustomed to deep potations, and who had been really in earnest when he said that Farmer Vanni's wine was of a quality that made it necessary to count the glasses, declined to drink any more, though strongly urged to do so by his two companions.

Signor Alessandro Bartoldi, the well-known attorney of Fano, was a good sort of man enough in his way. He had long been a widower, and lived only for his one daughter. But he had very little comprehension of living for her, or doing anything for her, in any other way than by increasing the handsome fortune which he had already accumulated for her. Though too much

disposed to be all things to all men,—to be called a perfectly honest man in the largest sense of the word,—he was thoroughly such in the more restricted and ordinary understood signification of the term. He was strictly honest in his professional avocation, and in his pursuit of wealth ; being genuinely persuaded that for that purpose, at least in his department of the world's affairs, honesty was the best policy. A veritable Vicar of Bray in politics, he had quite sense enough to understand that the recent changes were calculated to increase the material prosperity of the country ; and was, therefore, well disposed towards the new government. But, not being at all of the stuff of which martyrs are made, he had felt no disposition to risk getting himself into trouble by taking any part in the extrusion of the old order of things. He never talked politics, nor got into the way of hearing them talked if he could help it. He always obeyed the law ; and was one of those men who may take oaths of allegiance to a dozen different governments in succession, without being justly chargeable with any false swearing ; for his allegiance was sincerely rendered to every ruler as long as he was in power ; and he most assuredly never contemplated promising it for an hour longer. Besides, and after his daughter, the only thing he cared for in the world was his collection of ancient documents, charters, grants, contracts, and such like, which was noted as the most important collection of the kind in that part of Italy, and by means of which he purposed some day illustrating a work on the history of Romagna and the March of Ancona.

He was a little, alert, brisk old gentleman, with a small, round, closely and always cleanly shaven face, a florid complexion, a shrewd twinkling eye, a benignant expression of features, an almost entirely bald head, and a forehead deeply marked with a whole series of horizontal furrows, the result probably of a life-long habit of raising his eyebrows and assuming an expression intended to suggest that there was a great deal to be said on both sides, which he always resorted to whenever

any difference of opinion or difficulty of any sort was mooted before him. If that little pantomime was found insufficient to set the matter at rest, as far as he was concerned, he would, if sitting down, nurse one leg laid over the knee of the other, handling it with the greatest tenderness, as if it represented the question in hand ; or, if standing up, stick his thumbs into the arm-holes of his waistcoat, throw his head back, and enunciate the ejaculation, "Per—r—r Bac—co !" or, sometimes, if the case were a grave one, "Per—r—din—ci Bacco !" uttering the words very slowly and with a long-drawn breath, and following it up with three or four raisings and depressions of his chin, executed with a slow uniform motion like the working of a steam-engine piston.

Signor Alessandro Bartoldi was no fool withal ; but these little peculiarities constituted the arms, offensive and defensive, which he had found most available for making his way and holding his own in a somewhat disjointed world, and in difficult times.

"I wanted to speak to you to-day, my esteemed friend," said the attorney, addressing the farmer, "on a little matter, in which it has seemed to me that I might be able to be of use to you. I know I may speak freely before his reverence ; for I am aware of the friendship that unites him to your family. Indeed, I am fortunate in having an opportunity of profiting by his valuable counsel in the matter ; though it is a bit of good fortune that I did not anticipate."

The priest gave a little bow, but said nothing. Signor Alessandro Bartoldi was no favourite of his ; for Don Evandro was a politician of the class, whose members consider every one against them who is not with them ; and he knew what to expect from Sandro in that matter. Although the project of a marriage between Beppo Vanni and Lisa Bartoldi had been first set on foot by him, the idea had not arisen out of any personal intimacy between him and the attorney, but had first been suggested to him by a brother priest of Fano, who was anxious to secure the attorney's wealth to the good cause ; which Don

Evandro had thought effectually to do by conferring it, with Lisa's hand, on the submissive son of his eminently right-minded parishioner and intimate friend, old Farmer Vanni.

Honest little Sandro, on the other hand, did not much like the priest, who had now and then a way of looking at him which he did not fancy. He always felt in his company as if he were in the presence of a sharp detective officer prepared to make use against him of any word that might fall from his lips should a time ever come when the priest might find it desirable to do so. However, in obedience to his unfailing maxim and practice to hold the best candle he could lay his hands on to every devil or devil's emissary whom he might be doomed to meet in his way through life, he spoke as above in opening his business with the farmer.

"Everybody knows," resumed the little man, "the admirable and truly Christian manner in which you have received, educated, and supported your orphan relative, the Signorina Giulia. All Fano has rung with your praises on this score, my valued friend, and you have well deserved them!"

Don Evandro here looked at the farmer with a fixed and peculiar look that caused the hard-featured old man to drop his eyes before it. The priest had no special reason for thus reminding his parishioner of any circumstances that might be in both their hearts at that moment. But it was part of his system, so long practised as to have become quite habitual to him, never to lose any opportunity of acquiring or consolidating power over others, be they who they might, or let the means be what they might. That was all the object of the look—and the object was gained. The old man's eyes fell, and his heart recognised his master.

"But," resumed the attorney, "for a girl such as the Signorina Giulia, who has her bread to earn, and her way to make in the world, it would be a great thing to obtain some knowledge of many things which she would perhaps be more likely to pick up in the city than in your own

undoubtedly more agreeable home. I put it to you, your reverence, since we are happy enough to have the benefit of your presence, whether it does not strike you in that like?"

"Most unquestionably!" replied the priest. "There can be no doubt about the matter. It would be extremely advantageous to *la Giulia* to sojourn for a while in the city, if we only knew any means of placing her there with propriety. But that is the difficulty."

"Just so! that was the difficulty! Now that difficulty I think I have been fortunate enough to find the means of removing."

"Indeed, Signor Sandro!" said Vanni, beginning to see that the removal in question might be desirable for more reasons than that assigned by the cautious little attorney. "Truly we shall have reason to be very much obliged to you. What is it you are good enough to think of proposing for *la Giulia poverina*?"

"Why, this it is," replied Signor Sandro, addressing himself to the farmer, but looking at Don Evandro, and evidently considering him as the more important personage to be consulted; "a friend and very good client of mine, an elderly widow lady, whose—a—companion has lately left her, wants to meet with—what shall I say? Not exactly a servant, and perhaps not altogether a companion; somebody, in short, who for a moderate recompense—moderate, for my friend is not rich—would live with her, and take care of her and her house, and be taught all of housekeeping that my friend could teach—not a small matter, allow me to say, for *la Signora Clementina Dossi* is a capital housekeeper, I can tell you—and—do what there is to be done in the house."

"Be a servant-of-all-work, in short!" said Farmer Vanni.

"*Che! che! che!* Servant-of-all-work!" cried the attorney, who had been particularly labouring to prevent his proposition from assuming any such appearance; for he well knew and understood the *contadino* pride which would be likely to rise in arms against such a proposal.

It was not, as the attorney knew perfectly well, any tenderness on the part of the old farmer for his adopted child that made the notion of accepting a place as maid-of-all-work distasteful to him, but that he shrank from having it said that an inmate of Bella Luce, one of his family, and bearing his name, had been obliged to accept such a position.

"Nothing like a servant-of-all-work ! scarcely a servant at all, I tell you."

"I should not like Giulia to take a place of maid-of-all-work. None of the Vannis have ever been in service," said the old farmer, rather grimly.

"Of course not, my dear friend. Can you imagine such a thing ? I should not like to stand in the shoes of the man who should come up to Bella Luce, to propose to the head of the Vanni family to send one of its members to menial service. But this is quite a different matter. We are upon quite other ground. I appeal to his reverence, here, whose opinion we should both of us bow to implicitly, whether there is any similitude between the two cases."

And Signor Sandro ventured a speaking look at the priest as he spoke.

"Certainly it does seem to me," said the priest, "since you ask my opinion, that this is a proposition which any man might freely accept without in any degree compromising the credit of his family. Judging, my dear Signor Vanni, from the details Signor Sandro has been good enough to lay before us, I should say that there was nothing in common between the position he has in view for the Signorina Giulia and that of a menial servant."

"Clearly not ! I was sure his reverence's admirable judgment would see the thing in its true light at once. You see, my dear friend, there is no question of any wages as such ; merely a gratuitous *douceur*,—'*gratitudinis causa*,' I may say,—our friend Don Evandro will appreciate the appropriateness of the expression,—for service willingly rendered on the one hand, and thank-

fully received, rather than exacted, on the other. You will perceive, my esteemed Signor Vauni, all the essential differences of the position from that of one holding a menial capacity."

The farmer would have been very much puzzled to explain in what the difference consisted, that Signor Sandro had been setting forth so eloquently. But he understood that his priest approved the measure. So he said :—

"I am sure, Signor Sandro, that we are very much obliged to you, on poor Giulia's account ; and, since *il Signor Curato* thinks well of it, it can't be other than right. I should not have liked the girl to go to service, because it's well known that none of the Vannis ever did go to service," repeated the farmer once again.

"And then, you know, my much esteemed Signor Vanni, I will not attempt to conceal from you, that to a certain degree I had an eye to other considerations,—to a certain degree, I say,—and hoped in this matter, as I may say, to kill two birds with one stone."

"Which was th' other bird, then ? " asked the farmer, bluntly.

"Well, now, I would bet a wager that his reverence the *Curato* has already guessed my thoughts upon the subject ! Is it not so, your reverence ? " asked the little man, putting his head on one side, and looking at the priest in a way that seemed to claim the fellowship of a kindred high intelligence.

"You have been thinking, Signor Sandro, that it might be just as well to remove *la Giulia* for a while from the companionship of our young friend Beppo, if we are to hope to bring those arrangements to bear which I had the honor of proposing to my friend Vanni. That was your worship's thought, I take it ; and I agree with you."

"*'Rem acu tetigisti,'* which means, as your reverence knows better than I can tell you, that you have exactly hit the right nail on the head. Don't you see it, Signor Vanni ? "

"I see that I don't mean to allow our Beppo to have anything to say to Giulia, not in the way of marrying—it isn't likely."

"Well, then, my dear Sir, since we have our eyes on a young lady, who may perhaps with better reason pretend to the honour of an alliance with Signor Beppo, and since youth is sometimes apt to be blind and self-willed in these matters, does it not appear to you a judicious measure to remove the source of danger?"

"Surely, surely! And I do hope that, when she is gone, the lad will come round, and not break my heart any more," said the old farmer.

"Ha! the best way to exorcise the charm, is to pack off the charmer, in these cases. Is it not so, your reverence?" laughed the attorney.

"I think, as I have said, that your proposal is a sound and judicious one, Signor Sandro," replied the priest, "both with a view to our young friend Beppo's advantage, and as likely to be exceedingly useful to *la povera Giulia*."

"Then we may consider the matter as settled. I am sure I shall have killed *three* birds with one stone, and rendered a service to my old friend and client *la Signora Clementina* into the bargain. I have no doubt she and *la Signorina* will get on capitally together."

"And we are all very much obliged to you, I am sure!" said the old farmer, a little more graciously than he had spoken hitherto. "When do you think that *la Giulia* had better go to her new home?"

"Well! of course I would not say a word to Signora Dossi till I had consulted you. I am quite sure she will be only too glad to get such a prize as the Signorina Giulia. I must see her, and settle about it. I should suppose it would be a case of the sooner the better;—perhaps next Sunday. You would then be at leisure to bring her into town yourself, Signor Vanni, and see my good friend, Signora Dossi, which will be satisfactory to you. Would that suit you?"

"Yes, I could bring Giulia in on Sunday very

well! Yes, that would suit very well," replied the farmer.

"And then you should come and eat a bit of dinner with me, you know, before returning home," added Signor Sandro, rubbing his hands cheerily.

"Well! thankye. You are very good! That will all suit very well! On condition, however, that you will come up and dine at Bella Luce on Lady-day," put in the *contadino* pride. "Is it a bargain?"

"With pleasure, my dear Sir! There is my hand upon it. I would ask my friend Beppo to come with you on Sunday, only — you understand. There would be no use in long leave-takings, and chattering, and nonsense; you comprehend me! And it would be better, perhaps, if he and Lisa were to meet not so immediately, but after a little while."

These considerations were quite beyond the reach of farmer Vanni's mental powers. He said, however, that "certainly that would be best;" and the priest gave the little attorney an intelligent nod, which the latter returned with half a dozen, accompanied by winks to match.

"It is understood, then, my dear Signor Vanni, that, unless you hear anything from me to the contrary, you bring in *la Signorina Giulia* on Sunday. Come direct to my house, and I will go with you to Signora Dossi. You will find her, and *la Giulia* will find her, an excellent worthy creature—a heart of gold! At what hour can you be in the city?"

"Oh! early: so as to be back at Bella Luce before the Ave Marie."

"Then I'll tell you. You must be early enough to go to *la Clementina* before high mass—say before eleven o'clock. We will dine at mid-day, which will give you plenty of time."

"Thank you. That will do very well. Will you come and have a look at the vines?"

Signor Sandro knew the *contadino* nature too well, and was too desirous of standing well with the wealthy farmer

to refuse this invitation. So they strolled out together into the field where Vanni had been at work, and to which his two sons had already returned. The priest, remarking that he had a few words to say to *la Signora Sunta*, remained behind ; and he and Signor Sandro exchanged an adieu with somewhat more cordiality than they usually adopted towards each other.

And thus poor Giulia's destiny was settled for her, as women's destinies mostly are settled, without their knowledge or co-operation in any way ; and the old gentlemen made up their minds that, when the dangerous charmer should have been removed, the charm would cease to operate on the refractory Beppo.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ANNOUNCEMENT.

As soon as the attorney had started on his way homewards, carefully leading his old horse Moro by the bridle down the first steep bit from the house of Bella Luce to the bottom of the valley, Farmer Vanni pulled off his jacket and returned to his work of dressing the vines in the home vineyard, without saying a word to any one of the family of the important business that had been determined on. He knew, however, that his wife would hear it all from the priest; but was pretty sure that it would not be mentioned by either of them to Giulia before he should himself communicate the tidings to her. He pondered a little on the question, how and when he should break the news to his son; and eventually determined to say nothing at all to him specially on the subject;—to mention it to Giulia in his presenee, treating the matter as if it was one which very little concerned Beppo in any way.

Don Evandro, when the farmer and the attorney went out together, passed from the kitchen into the loggia,

where he found *la sposa*, as he thought he should, quietly plying her distaff and spindle, seated on the squared trunk of a chestnut-tree, which had done duty for a bench in the loggia for more than one generation.

"Signor Sandro came up here to make a proposal which seems to me to have much good sense in it," said the priest, sitting down by the side of Dame Assunta, and offering her a pinch of snuff as he spoke.

"A proposal, your reverence? And what was that?"

"Why, that this troublesome, headstrong girl, Giulia, should be sent to service in Fano, to a place he has found for her. Of course he has his own object to serve."

"To service! Will Vanni consent to that? None of the Vannis ever *did* go to service!"

"He has consented. The lawyer made it out that it was not altogether a regular servant's place; and in speaking to Vanni, you must not call it so, mind."

"He has consented?"

"Yes! of course he did! It is a very good thing. What is the use of letting those two go on in the house together? The only way is to part them. Don't you see?"

"I don't think she gives him any encouragement."

"Bah—h!" cried the priest, shrugging his shoulders, and drawing out the expletive into an expression of the most utterly contemptuous unbelief. "She has got eyes in her head! I tell you, the only way is to separate them."

"Well, I am sure, if your reverence thinks so——. But I am afraid he won't forget her a bit more. He isn't of the sort that forgets. The Vannis are all terrible holders-on to anything they once lay hold of,—terrible!"

"Forget! Well, perhaps this remembering may serve our purpose equally well! Is there no way of falling out with a lover, Signora Vanni, besides forgetting him? Don't you see?"

"I don't see what is to serve, unless we can get him

to put the girl clean out of his head. I wish to Heaven she had never darkened these doors ; I do with all my heart ! ”

“ Ah ! It’s too late in the day to wish that now ! But, don’t you sec what will happen ? Look at that girl ! You don’t see such a girl every day. Do you think the men won’t come round her in the city, there, like the flies come to the sugar ? And she with her spirit and giddy laughing ways, and eighteen years ! You don’t think she is going to mope and pine, and think of nothing but Beppo ! And he need not fancy anything of the kind.”

“ I am quite sure the hussy will see nobody so well worth thinking of,” said the mother.

“ That’s very likely. But she will think of what’s under her eyes. The fellows will come round her. She can’t help herself if she would. Then what follows ? Beppo will be jealous—angry—furious. He will hear all her goings-on. Of course he will ; it will be our own fault if he does not. And it’s odd to me if we can’t bring him to the point of marrying the first girl ready to have him.”

“ But *is* Lisa Bartoldi ready to have him ? ” asked Signora Assunta.

“ That will be Signor Sandro’s business to see to. A girl is always more easy to manage than a boy, in these cases. And such a girl as Lisa Bartoldi ! I have seen her. There will be no difficulty with her. Signor Sandro has only got to say that it is what he chooses.”

“ You think so ? ”

“ *Altro !* no doubt of it. So you see, *Signora mia*, this plan of sending *la Giulia* to the city may serve our turn, even if we don’t persuade Signor Beppo to forget all about her,” said the priest, looking at her with a smile that was half a sneer.

“ I hope it may ; and I’ve no manner of doubt that your reverence knows what is best and wisest,” said the farmer’s wife, submissively. “ Had I better tell *Giulia* that she is to go ? ”

"I think not. No doubt Signor Vanni will speak of it this evening. Perhaps you had better leave it to him to mention it."

"Yes. I think I should like that best. Giulia is a good girl, poor thing, and submissive enough, mostly; but now and then she will break out, and then there is no speaking to her. I declare I have shaken in my shoes as I stood up to her, before now, though you would not think it."

The priest smiled a peculiar smile, and took a pinch of snuff.

"It comes like a flash of lightning with her," continued Signora Vanni, busily twirling away at her spindle as she talked, "and it's all over in a minute; and then she runs away and shuts herself into her room. Yes, I should like best that Vanni should tell her himself. Is it fixed when she is to go to Fano?"

"Signor Vanni has promised the attorney to take her himself next Sunday, if he hears nothing from him to the contrary," replied the priest, quietly.

"Next Sunday! And this is Thursday! Merely upon us! that's very sudden! And her things. The poor girl should be sent decent, you know. She is a Vanni, after all!" remonstrated the *padrona*, no little startled by the abruptness of the proposed measure, though her surprise did not avail to arrest the habitual plying of the spindle.

"The only question is, whether the time between the telling her, and the sending her off, is not too long as it is," said the priest. "I should have preferred letting her know nothing about it till Vanni called her to start with him for Fano."

"But her things!" exclaimed the mistress of the house, whose housewifely notions of propriety were painfully shocked by the idea of having only forty-eight hours allowed her for preparation in that exclusively female department.

"Anything that is not ready can be sent after her. Do you not perceive," continued the spiritual adviser, "that

it is by no means desirable that there should be much opportunity for leave-taking and exchanging of promises, and vows, and tears, and all that sort of thing ? ”

“ Oh, dear ! I don’t think that Giulia would give in to anything of the kind. I don’t indeed, your reverence Bless your heart ! if we had seen anything of that sort, we should have made short work of it before now, you may depend on it ! Oh, no ! Giulia is a sensible girl, and knows her place ; though she does go off into a fit of tantrums now and then. Though I am his mother, I must say that the foolery has all been on Beppo’s part. But, there ! we know what young men are. It was so in my time. And though they do talk so much about the world being changed, I suppose it’s much as it was in that matter.”

“ Well ! if you will take my advice, you will just keep an eye on them, as much as you can, for these two days, and don’t let them be together a bit more than you can possibly help.”

“ I’ll take care, your reverence.”

“ And, look here ! ” said the priest, as he rose from his seat on the chestnut log beside her, and turned to leave the loggia, “ you can send her up to the cura to lend Nunziata a helping-hand. I’ll tell *la* Nunziata to detain her all day ; and that will help to keep her out of his way one day, at all events.”

“ Yes, your reverence.”

“ Good afternoon, Signora Vanni.”

“ Good afternoon, and many thanks, your reverence.”

Breakfast, as a meal, is not known to Italian peasants, and is not a matter of much moment to the inhabitants of Italian cities. In the farmhouses, the usual practice is to eat at mid-day, and again when the day’s work is over in the evening. And there is very little difference if any, between the two meals. *La zuppa* is the standing dish, generally the most important ; and, in the poorer families, often the only dish at either meal. There is far less difference, however, between the more easily circumstanced and the poorer families of the *con-*

tudino class, than is the case among our own rural population. The poorer are less hard pushed than are our own very poor; and the richer are more thrifty,—more niggardly, if the reader please,—and more given to saving than our own people when in easy circumstances. A rich Italian countryman likes to make a show of his wealth; but it is only done on special and rare occasions and solemnities. The general staple of his life is fashioned on very much the same plan as that of his poorer neighbours.

The whole of the feast spread before the unexpected visitor at Bella Luce, the *menu* of which had been rehearsed by the mistress of the house with almost as much ostentation as that which struts in the written *cartes* of more aristocratic houses, had been, with the exception of the *minestra*, and probably the rashers, an improvised addition to the family repast. And at supper-time, the remnant of the *frittata*, and a fragment of the fowl, furnished an unusually luxurious second course after the never-failing *zuppa* or *minestra*; the difference between the two being, that the first is made with bread *sopped* (*inzuppato*) in broth, and the second always with some form of what is known in England as macaroni, but which is more commonly called in all parts of Italy, save Naples, *pasta*. The latter is often, especially in the north of Italy, eaten with so large a proportion of the solid material, to so small a quantity of the liquid, as no longer to correspond with our idea of soup at all.

Giulia did not make her appearance again in the kitchen till she came out from her hiding-place to prepare the evening meal. On any other occasion *la Signora Vanni* would probably have been after her before that time, to see that the spindle was duly twirling, and the ball of yarn on it duly swelling; though, to tell the truth, Giulia was not an idle girl, and generally got through the hank of flax on her distaff in as short a time as *la sposa* herself. But upon the present occasion the mistress was not anxious for a meeting with Giulia; and the latter attributed the unusual prolongation of the privacy

permitted to her to the dish of chat with the priest which she knew Sunta was enjoying, and which she supposed was being prolonged during the whole afternoon.

When she came into the kitchen to perform her evening duty *la sposa* was not there ; and Giulia prepared the supper by herself.

The usual hour came ; the sun was dipping his red disk behind exactly that bit of the crest of the Apennine which he always touched every evening at the time when the vines were being pruned, and was flinging a great glowing patch on just that section of the far-off Adriatic which was visible from the mouth of the Bella Luce valley ; and Giulia, having completed her preparations for the evening meal, was standing at the door dreamily looking out at the slowly fading glory, when the farmer and his two sons came strolling slowly up from their light day's work.

Reverie is generally accompanied by a graceful position and arrangement of the body and limbs. It is not advisable to practise reverie with a view to attaining this result, inasmuch as the intention would suffice to prevent the desired effect ; the cause of the fact being simply this, that reverie presupposes an absence of self-consciousness, and, therefore, ministers to grace exactly as an excess of self-consciousness mars it and ensures awkwardness and affectation.

Giulia's attitude, as she stood at the kitchen door, is chargeable with this little *excursus*. It was singularly graceful ; and her figure as she stood, so that a slanting ray just caught and lent a glory to her head, while the rest of her person was in shadow, if only it could have been transferred to canvas by some artist, who would have been contented to add nothing to what he saw, would have made the painter's fortune.

She was dressed in that mixture of colours so much affected by the Italian peasantry—red and blue. She had a blue skirt, a scarlet body, and white linen sleeves. The skirt was short enough, and the shoe cut low enough, and the white stocking well drawn enough to show to

proper advantage a specially trim ankle and well-formed foot. The scarlet body fitted well enough to set off admirably all the contours of a bust such as is rarely seen in cities—rarely among the over-luxurious rich ; more rarely still among the imperfectly-nourished poor. A little frilled collar, scrupulously clean, circled the matchless column of a throat, that, sunburnt as it was, carried the head so exquisitely poised upon it, in a manner, and with a proud expression of unconscious dignity, which would have become a maiden queen. The rare abundance of raven hair was neatly, and, indeed, artistically arranged in masses on the sides and at the back of her head. A long silver bodkin, with a large round head of flagee work, was passed through the knot of it at the back. She was standing with her left shoulder slightly leaning against the door-post ; the elbow of her right arm was resting on the palm of her left hand ; and her chin, somewhat drooping, was supported by her right hand.

If it be asked whether all the girls in the farm-houses of the Romagna have their collars as scrupulously clean, and their whole costume as neat and attractive as that of Giulia Vanni undoubtedly was, I can only say that I have every reason to believe that the Romagna girls have the peculiarity of always appearing so when they live in the same house with such a young man as Beppo, whom they consider it to be their duty to keep at a distance.

The beauty of Giulia's figure and attitude had not been lost on Beppo, as he approached the house. His eye had eagerly sought the doorway, for it often happened that she stood there a few minutes at that hour to look out on the sunset sea and landscape. But as soon as she saw him—was it *quite* as soon ?—she flashed away like one of those pretty bright lizards of her country, which may be watched basking on a stone as long as they are unconscious of the watcher's presence, but which flash out of sight with the speed of lightning as soon as they become aware that they are looked at.

Giulia vanished, and did not show herself in the kitchen till the men and the mistress of the family had

taken their places at the supper-table. Then she slipped in and quietly took her usual place on the bench next the wall, by the side of the Signora Santa. The farmer occupied one end of the long narrow table, and the two young men sat on the outer bench, opposite to their mother and cousin.

The meal proceeded in silence till the soup had been eaten, and then the farmer said, "There ! a man can talk better when he has got something in the inside of him, especially when he has been in the fields all day ; and I have got something to tell you. There is a *benedizione del cielo** for you, Giulia. What should you say to going to live a spell at Fano, to learn all manner of things that city-folks know, and that you might live up here everlasting without ever knowing?"

"Me, Signor Paolo?" said Giulia, looking up in amazement.

"Yes, you!—who else? And, to make it short, it don't much signify what you think of it, for it's all settled. There's a place found for you."

"A place! Go away from Bella Luce!" gasped Giulia, while the open scarlet bodice began to rise and fall very perceptibly.

Beppo had remained fixed, as if suddenly turned to stone, with his mouth open, one hand with his fork in it raised in air, and the other grasping his knife, held bolt upright on the table, staring at his father, and making but slow progress as yet towards realising the full import of the announcement.

"Yes, a place ; and a very good one too," resumed the farmer.

"Oh ! Si'or Paolo ; please don't send me away ! I'll work harder and spin more ! Don't send me to service ! I'd far rather live always at Bella Luce !" said poor Giulia, wholly unconscious of the possible construction that might be put on her last words.

"Always live at Bella Luce ! Ah ! that I'll be sworn

* A popular phrase for a great and unexpected benefit.

you would!" sneered the old man, bitterly and grimly; "but that is just what I don't mean you to do, my girl!"

The blood rushed in an impetuous torrent all over Giulia's brown cheek, and over her forehead and neck. Her ears tingled, her hands burned, and she felt as if she should have choked. It was some relief to her to know that no one of the party save the old man was looking at her. Beppo was still staring in speechless dismay at his father; and Carlo was watching his brother with a malicious smile. The eyes of *la sposa* were fixed upon her plate. With a mighty effort of will, Giulia prevented herself from sobbing or giving any other outward sign of her distress.

Presently all the tingling blood flowed back again, and she sat as pale and motionless as a corpse, with her eyes fixed on the table.

"And what do you mean by talking about service?" continued the farmer, angrily. "Who said anything about service? You are not going to service; and you are never to speak of your position as such. None of the Vannis ever did go to service; and you are a Vanni, worse luck! You are never to speak to any one of going to service, do you hear?"

"But, father, everybody will know it! You can't think to keep it a secret!" said his son Beppo, at last, flattering himself that he had found an unanswerable argument against the measure.

"You hold your tongue, booby!" said his father, roughly, yet with a very different sort of manner from that in which he had spoken to the stranger within his gates. "Believe me, you know nothing about it. What I mean is, that the place Giulia is going to is not the place of a menial servant. Do you hear, Giulia?"

"Yes, Signor Paolo," said Giulia, now able to speak calmly, in a low, submissive voice.

"And you understand that you are never to speak to any one of being in service?"

"Yes, Si'or Paolo," repeated Giulia, still keeping her eyes fixed on the table.

"And his reverence quite approves of it; and thinks you ought to be very thankful for your good fortune! Do you hear?"

"Yes, Si'or Paolo."

"And Signor Sandro, who was good enough to think of you, and to find this fine opportunity, and to ride up here to day on purpose to bring the offer of it, says that it's a very advantageous thing!"

"Was it Signor Sandro's kindness to think of this scheme?" asked Giulia, looking up at the farmer for a moment.

"Yes, it was! and very kind of him, I take it!" replied the old man.

"Very!" said Giulia, while a very legible sneer curved her lip into a form of beauty that was not habitual to it, and flashed in one brief gleam out of her eyes, before she again dropped them on the table.

"Do you think it necessary, Si'or Paolo," she asked in a hard, constrained sort of tone, after there had been a minute or two of silence, "to send me away from Bella Luce, for—for—your own views as well as for my advantage?" She knew that the old man would understand her, and that the others, at all events Beppo, would not.

He looked hard at her, as he answered, "Yes, I do think it is necessary."

Giulia set her teeth hard together, and clenched her hands under the table till the nails nearly cut the skin, while a little shiver passed over her, leaving her as rigid, as pale, and as hard-looking as marble. And she said nothing more.

"But you have said nothing about the time, Paolo!" said *la Signora Sunta*, who, with the difficulty about "the things" heavy on her mind, felt that the worst part of the farmer's communication still remained untold.

The time! why, as his reverence said, and Signor Sandro said too, the sooner the better! You can't be too much in a hurry to make sure of a good thing! I shall be able to go into Fano with her on Sunday; and that

will be the best day. It was all settled so with Signor Sandro."

"It'll be very difficult to get anything ready at all decent by that time. Do you hear, Giulia, my girl? You are to go on Sunday!" repeated *la* Sunta, for Giulia gave no sign of having heard a word more since the last answer the farmer had given to her question.

"Yes, Si'ora Sunta, I hear."

"Well, how ever we are to get your things ready by that time, I don't know."

"It won't signify much about the things," said poor Giulia, making a very narrow escape from letting a sob escape her (and she would rather have knocked her head against the wall than have done so) as she spoke.

"Nonsense! don't signify! Why, you must go decent, child! You are a Vanni, after all!" remonstrated Signora Sunta.

"Worse luck!" said Giulia, re-echoing the farmer's previous words.

The old man scowled at her, but said nothing.

"Come up stairs with me, child, and help me to see what there is to be done. And thank God that you *are* a Vanni, and have got decent people to think for you and care for you!"

So Giulia got up and followed the *padrona* out of the kitchen, venturing as she passed to cast one furtive side-long look at Beppo from under her eyelashes. It was by no means intended to meet any look of his. It was merely a look of observation.

It found him still in a state of collapse from the extremity of his astonishment and dismay.

CHAPTER VII.

MAIDEN MEDITATIONS.

WHEN Giulia at last escaped from *la Signora Sunta*, and the inspection and consideration of "things," and was able to get away to her own little chamber for the night, she felt as if she had been stunned during the last two or three hours, and was only now for the first time able to bring her mind really to bear with anything that could be called thought, on the communication that had been made to her. She drew the rough bolt which supplied the place of lock and handle on the door of her room through its two rusty staples by its hanging handle, and having thus made sure of privacy, she sat down on the side of her bed to think.

And the thoughts that came were very bitter. It was not that she was being separated from Beppo. *Che!* What was Beppo to her? What could Beppo ever be to her? She had known all that before, not now for the first time. She knew very well that he loved her. What was the good of pretending not to be aware of it? But was that her fault? And she herself—did she care for him? What business had anybody to ask that? What

right had anybody to think it? She was quite sure that Beppo must fancy she hated him. Had not she always behaved as if she had an aversion to him? Had she ever sought his love? Had she not abstained from even raising her eyes to look on the sacred heir-apparent of the house? Had she not striven loyally? She knew his position; she knew her own; she knew his father's hopes and wishes. Had not she been loyal? And now she was turned out of the house for fear Beppo should make love to her! And others were to be consulted! She was to be talked over with strangers! This smooth-spoken attorney from Fano—his kindness to her! *Oh, bella!* as if she did not see through his kindness, and understand it all! Had she tried to stand in the way of his daughter? Let the whitey-brown thing have Beppo, if she could catch him. She had a certain amount of doubt about her success in that respect; even though she, the poor cousin, were turned into the streets to secure it!

It was hard to bear; very, very hard! How cautious she had been! how proudly determined never to allow room for a suspicion that she had abused the charity of which she was the object, to the securing of a rich marriage. Cautious!—she had been cruel in her proud humility, yes, cruel to poor Beppo—honest, frank, simple, loving-hearted Beppo. Love her! That he did. At all events she would never be guilty of the hypocrisy to herself of pretending not to know how truly, deeply, devotedly, untiringly he had loved her! And how proudly cold she had always been to him! How she had denied him every opportunity of being alone with her! How she had affected not to understand his simple, honest love-making, to despise his bluff, awkward compliments, to turn away from the frank, loving glance of his great blue eyes! And all for this! And as these thoughts passed through her mind the hard, proud mood gradually faded out of it, the lip began to quiver, her breath came short, the tears gathered slowly in her eyes; and presently, as a special recollection crossed her mind of poor

Beppo's look, when at his last *coppo* he had walked into Fano, and bought a neck riband of a colour she had praised, and she had told him at his return that he had better give it to Nina Cganci, at Santa Lucia, for that she had changed her mind, and should never wear that colour again,—a passionate agony of weeping seized her. Oh ! how she saw before her his look of pain and disappointment, as he flung the despised gift behind the kitchen fire ! And she threw herself down on the pillow, sobbing at the thought as though her heart would break.

But when the paroxysm of uncontrollable weeping had in some degree subsided, she began to question herself about her future conduct, especially on the immediate occasion of her departure. Beppo would endeavour to speak with her ;—to bid her farewell, at least. Was she to take care that he got no opportunity of doing so ? Was it likely that he would confine himself to a simple farewell ? Would not so fair, so plausible an opportunity, be seized for saying something else as well ? And how was that something else to be answered ? Must her answer—her final answer to him—be of a piece with all her past conduct ? Had his father deserved of her that it should be so ? Was she bound in honour, and in gratitude for the charity, that was now about to be withdrawn from her, to continue to sacrifice his happiness, and—her own ? Yes ; the hot blush came with the thought, though no human being was there to see it. It was the sacrifice of her own happiness. Yes ! Conscience had spoken the truth ! Let it stand. She would affect or attempt to deny it no more. Was she bound to continue this self-sacrifice ? Had she not done enough ? Might she not consider all accounts to be squared between herself and Paolo Vanni ? In that case, with how different a heart should she go away from Bella Luce, and face the world ! In that case—ah ! would not the little attorney's interference turn out to have been a blessing ? In that case—at the delicious moment when those dear, honest blue eyes should look once again so wistfully into hers, and she should be able with one glance and half a word

to let him know that all the past had been a delusion and a falsehood ;—that the cruel duty which had coerced her every word and look was a duty no longer ! And Beppo would know at last that she was not cold, nor proud, nor capricious, nor insensible. Ah ! the happiness of giving this happiness !

But hold a moment ! Was it solely duty and gratitude towards Paolo Vanni, and respect for his wishes, that had governed her conduct towards Beppo ? Why had she felt at supper-time, when he had misunderstood, or affected to misunderstand, her unlucky speech about her wish always to live at Bella Luce,—why had she then felt as if she wished the earth to gape and swallow her up ? Surely that was not all because the old farmer seemed to suspect her of ungratefully opposing herself to his will ! If he had accused her of any other form of ingratitude, would she have felt the same ? No ! assuredly she would not. There was some other feeling then at work, to stir her heart so powerfully and painfully ?

She honestly then set to work to discover the nature of this other feeling.

Like to live at Bella Luce ! She, the poor, portionless, destitute orphan ! No doubt !—said old Paolo Vanni. And oh, what agony it had been to hear and see his sneer, as he spoke the words ! Would nobody else say and think the same ? If she were to suffer dear, honest Beppo to love her, would not the world also sneer, and say that she liked to live at Bella Luce, especially as its mistress ? And could she endure that ? Would not men tell each other that the worst day's work old Paolo Vanni ever did, was when he brought the orphan girl home to be received into his family ? Would it be tolerable that such things should be said ? Would not the women say, that she laid herself out for poor simple Beppo's admiration,—had baited the hook with smiles, and who knows what else, and cleverly caught her fish ? Could, oh ! could she bear that ? And for all the family, and the friends and relatives to look on her as an unwelcome intruder, who had pushed her way among them by—.

Oh, it made her turn sick, and a cold shiver pass over her, to think of the filling up that would be supplied to that blank !

Like to live at Bella Luce, would she ? I dare say ! And poor Beppo too ! Lord bless you, *he* never suspected anything !

No ! no ! no ! she could *not* bear it ! Death rather, a thousand times rather than such agony.

Bless you, Sir, she snared him like a bird in a springe ! He had no chance with her—there in the same house with him ! And he so simple and honest too ! Ah, she was a cunning one ! Love ! don't tell me ! Yes, I dare say, she was in love with the broad acres of Bella Luce. Ah, it was a bad day for the Vannis when that sly baggage came into the house ;—and she without a smock to her back. Why, if it had not been for her wiles and lures, Beppo might have had old Sandro Bartoldi's daughter ; and what a match that would have been !

And then the women would smile, and cast their eyes down, and say that a woman could always bring a man to her lure—if she chose to do so ! Only it is not every woman, nor many women, thank Heaven ! who would do it.

No ! These things should never, never be said of her. No ! Though her heart broke in the struggle. No ! Though she should be obliged to keep a smiling face to-morrow, while her heart was dropping tears of blood. Ay, to-morrow ! it would be a hard task that morrow,—and the day after ! A hard and difficult task.

Poor Beppo, too, how he would be pained ! How she must torture him. Avoid all possible meeting. That was the only way. No good-byes ! No leave-takings ! That would never do ! She would not answer for herself, if, on the eve of parting, those honest, loving eyes got a chance of looking full into hers, while Beppo asked her if she had no word for him—if all his many years' faithful love must go for nothing ? How could she trust herself to answer that ? No, no ! no leave-takings !—no last words !

"Good-bye, Beppo!" with a nod and a saucy smile, while turning on her heel to go.

She acted the scene as the thoughts passed through her mind, and burst afresh into passionate and bitter tears in the midst of it.

Sudden as a flash of lightning the thought dashed through her brain, "Could Beppo have understood those horrid words, at dinner, as his father understood them? Did he, too, think that living at Bella Luce might mean——" she started to an upright position, and put her hands to her forehead, as if to help her mind to answer this question. And the answer came from the depths of her own heart, with assurance of its truth. No! No such thought would have found entrance into Beppo's heart. He was too good, too frank, too honest,—and—and—and loved her far too well!

And to leave him with the pain in his great loving heart without a word!

But no doubt he would soon console himself! There were plenty who would like to live always at Bella Luce. Was there not Lisa Bartoldi, a city lady, as fair and dainty as snow, and as rich as a Jew, ready to give him all the love of her heart? Oh! no fear of his pining!

And then she told herself that it was a lie—a wicked lie to say so! She knew that Beppo would never love Lisa Bartoldi. She knew that he would not console himself. She knew that none other than she could console him. She knew that he could love no other! And yet she must be mute, and say no word. She must be hard—hard as marble! cold, indifferent, gay as ever!

Oh! would to Heaven that these next two days were over! Would to heaven that it were *all* over!

And then she cried herself to sleep.

The next morning *la padrona* would have availed herself of the priest's hint, and sent Giulia to the parsonage to be out of the way, had it not been that the question of "the things" was still pressing too heavily on her. So she kept that resource in reserve for the next day, the

Saturday, before the Sunday fixed for Giulia's departure; and determined to keep her under her own eye all that day, assisting in the work of getting ready. Giulia acquiesced more than willingly in the commands of Sunta, to this effect. She was very glad to escape any meeting with Beppo that morning. As it was, she never went down stairs till after the men had gone out to their work in the field.

The great room over the kitchen was turned into a laundry for the nounce, for the making ready of Giulia's modest wardrobe; and there she and *la sposa* worked together till it was time to prepare the mid-day meal. That Giulia had no objection to venture down to do, for she knew that the men were away in the field. But when the time for dinner came, she had a strong inclination to say she was not hungry, and would continue their work up stairs while Sunta went down to dinner. But she was afraid of letting the old lady suspect that she feared meeting Beppo. She was afraid of the remarks that would be made, and the questionings. And especially she was afraid that the inevitable meeting, which must come, would be worse and more significative if it were deferred, and if it followed so unusual an event as her absence from the family mid-day meal.

So she made up her mind to go down to dinner. Only when the sunlight streaming in under the eaves of the farm-house touched that particular beam, which indicated that it was nearly noon, she said to *la sposa*, "Will you go and take the soup up, Si'ora Sunta, while I finish plaiting this collar? I will come down directly it is done."

But as soon as ever the old farmer's wife was out of the room, Giulia ran to the window, which was over the kitchen door, and looked out on the path by which the men would come home from the field; and carefully hiding herself behind the great heavy *persiane*, so as to be invisible from below, kept watch for their coming.

No chronometer can be more accurately true to time

than the Italian peasant is in knocking off his work at mid-day. They carry no watches, but they never miss the time. It was not many minutes therefore that Giulia had to watch before the men came towards the house. Yes ! there was Beppo, with his pruning-hatchet hanging from his loins behind, and his broad, shallow white hat on the top of his curly brown hair, just as usual.

Was he just as usual ? Generally the men would come in talking to each other. There was something to be said about the morning's work between the father and his eldest son ; but this morning the old man and Carlo were walking in advance, and Beppo was lagging behind. Giulia could not help fancying, too, that there was not the usual springy elasticity in his step. He was looking down on the ground as he walked, and she could not see his face, therefore, as he entered the kitchen door below her post of observation.

Giulia allowed a few minutes to elapse, to give them time to seat themselves at the table, and then slipping quietly down the stairs, she noiselessly entered the kitchen, and gliding to her usual place, sat down without raising her eyes or speaking. The meal passed in silence. Such a circumstance was not so strange at the table of a family of peasants, as it would have been at any other. The peasantry are less given to talking than the people of the towns, especially at table, unless indeed on the occasion of some festival. But that is a totally different thing—not differing in degree, so to speak, from the ordinary every-day dinner, but altogether in kind.

No remark, therefore, was elicited from any one of the party around the family table at Bella Luce, by the silence which prevailed among them. Nevertheless, every one of them knew what the cause of it was. Beppo tried hard to get an answering look from Giulia, as she sat opposite to him at the table, but in vain. She held her eyes obstinately glued to the table. He tried to get between her and the door, by which she had to leave the room when they got up from table ; but

she perceived or guessed his purpose, and was too quick for him, slipping through the door and bounding up the stair to the upper room, before he could get clear of the bench on which he had been sitting.

And so the dinner was got over. The slow hours of the afternoon wore away in completing the work of the morning by the two women upstairs in the great room. *La Sunta* tried two or three times to enter on a little talk about Giulia's prospects, about Signor Sandro's kindness, about the place Giulia was going to; but she found her unwilling to talk. She answered in half-whispered submissive monosyllables; and seemed utterly indifferent alike to all the little information Sunta could give her, and her many speculations concerning *la Signora Dossi*, and the duties that she, Giulia, would be expected to perform in her new sphere.

But when *la padrona* ventured on a few observations on the expediency of prudence as to her general conduct amid the dangers and temptations of the great world into which she was about to be launched—on the difficulties apt to arise from the combination of good looks such as hers—with poverty and a dependent position such as hers—and on the necessity of remembering always that she was a Vanni, Giulia's eyes gleamed in a manner which admonished Sunta that there were signs of "tantrums" in the air. She raised herself up from the work over which she was stooping, as she stood at the long table, and flashing through the tears that rose to her eyes at the mistress, who was on the other side of the table, opposite to her, she said,

"Would to God that I could forget it! Would to God everybody could forget it! Would to God a pestilence might blotch my face, and leave me as ugly as——"

"*Lisa Bartoldi*" was on her tongue. But a sudden thought of all the revelation there was in such a display of temper dashed through her brain just in time to save her from uttering it. The sudden pull-up brought with it too a change of feeling.

"Not that I am ungrateful, Signora Sunta," she added,

in a submissive tone, "for all your kindness to me. I hope you will never think so. I know how much I owe to you !"

"*Va bene ! Va bene !*" said the old woman, glad that the threatened storm had dissipated itself after one lightning flash and thunderbolt ; "there, let us get on with these sleeves and the collar, and then there will be nothing more to be done but to put a new hem to the petticoat ; and everything will be ready."

So they bent in silence over their work again. Santa, considering that it was perhaps natural that the girl should be a little out of sorts at the change before her, and having been sufficiently admonished by the little outbreak that had taken place, did not torment her further by any attempt at talking. Nothing further was uttered by either of them, except such brief words as the work in hand rendered necessary ; and before the Ave Maria, Giulia's little *trousseau* was completed.

And then came the supper, which was an exact repetition of the noontide meal. Again Giulia contrived to slip into her place after the others had taken their seats. And again she baffled Beppo in an attempt to gain one word, or at least one look, from her, by cutting off her retreat as they rose from the table.

And then there was another night of tears and passionate outbursts, succeeded by sad musings, which only confirmed her in the determination she had reached on the previous night, that no other course was open to her than an absolute avoidance of any private interview or last words of any kind with Beppo, and at every cost a continuation, for the few more hours that remained to her at Bella Luce, of the repelling conduct she had hitherto observed towards him.

And then, *da capo !*—tears, followed by the sleep that at eighteen years rarely fails to visit pillows so wetted.

In the morning of the Saturday she was still making something to do about the work that had been finished over night, in order to avoid going down stairs, till the

men should have left the house, when *la padrona* came into the room, and told her that she had promised his reverence the *Curato* that Giulia should go up that morning to the *Cura* to lend *la Nunziata* a hand at some work. Possibly, too, his reverence might wish to say a few words to her, before parting with his parishioner.

Giulia perfectly well understood the meaning of this arrangement, and was not at all disposed to quarrel with it. She was well pleased to spend the day at the *Cura*; and only hoped that his reverence's few words might be as few as possible. So she dallied yet a few minutes in the room over the kitchen, till she saw from the window of it the old farmer and his second son go forth to their work in the vineyard. Could it be that Beppo intended to absent himself from his day's work, and keep guard in the kitchen till she should come down! Surely under the present circumstances he would not venture upon such a step as that! What could she do? *Could* she tell *la padrona* that Beppo was alone in the kitchen, and that she could not pass through it except under her escort? She would jump out of the window rather.

She was not left long, however, in her difficulty. She was still standing at the window, not so carefully concealed as when she had been watching for the men to come home, when Beppo came slowly out of the door. He had only been lingering behind a few minutes in the hope that she would come down. When he had stepped two or three paces from the door, while Giulia was sadly marking his drooping head and dejected mien, he turned and looked up at the window. He evidently saw her, for his head was instantly raised and stretched upwards in an imploring attitude. He dared not raise his hands, for his father and brother were yet within sight of him. Yes! he evidently had seen her; but it could only have been for half an instant. For with a backward bound, as if she had put her foot on red-hot iron, she placed herself out of sight behind the shutter; yet so that she could still see him standing in the same attitude in anxious

hope for a while. Then he turned ; his head dropped again on his chest, and he dragged his limbs heavily to his work.

Then Giulia hurried down, and flitting like a frightened thing round to the back of the house from the kitchen door,—for the village of Santa Lucia was a little way up the valley, whereas the vineyard on which the men were at work was to the front of the house, looking down the valley,—set off for the priest's house.

His reverence, the *Curato*, was from home when she reached the *Cura* ; but his housekeeper, *la Nunziata*, was evidently prepared to receive her. She had rather dreaded to encounter the preachment which she expected from the priest, and had still more shrunk from all the questioning and gossiping which she anticipated from *la Nunziata*. But she was agreeably disappointed in this respect. *La Nunziata* had evidently received her cue. She just said that she was sorry they were going to lose Giulia from Santa Lucia ;—that it was very good of her to give her one more day's help, as she had so often done, before she went ; and then plunged into all the variety of little household matters, which she had, or had made a necessity for attending to.

The priest came home to his dinner at mid-day, but went out again, after his *siesta*, without Giulia having seen him. She began to flatter herself that the preachment part of the business would be spared her. The day passed better and more quickly than she had hoped ; the evening came, and she told *la Nunziata* that it was time for her to go home. But the housekeeper said that she must not in any case go without having spoken to his reverence ; that he would soon be in ; and that her orders were to keep Giulia till he came.

The preachment then was to be administered.

It was about half an hour after sundown when Don Evandro returned home,—just about the time they would be finishing supper and going to their rooms to bed, at Bella Luce. As soon as ever he came in Giulia was called into his little sanctum, evidently for the preachment.

She ventured, however, on entering to say—perhaps with a view of shortening the infliction as much as might be,—that she was afraid they would all be gone to bed at Bella Luce, and would think she was very late.

“Yes! they are all gone to bed by this time, except *la Signora Sunta*. I have just returned from the farm. You need be in no uneasiness about the time. I told *la Sunta* to wait for you a little while, as I had not had time to speak to you during the day.”

And then came the expected few words. But to Giulia’s great surprise, they were not all of the same sort with *la padrona’s* little attempt at preaching. Don Evandro spoke very kindly; said not a word about any dangers of the town, or anything of the sort;—seemed quite unconscieus of the existence of any such dangers. On the contrary, he spoke of his hopes that the amusements of the city, which were natural and proper for her age, would make her forget the regret which it was natural she would feel at first leaving her home of so many years—spoke of the indulgence of *la Signora Dossi*; she was an old woman now, but had been young herself; and would understand that a girl, such as Giulia, was not to be expected to lead the life of a woman of sixty. He had no doubt that she would find friends at Fano. Girls such as Giulia (a priest’s smile here, half-fatherly, half-gallant) rarely failed to find them. Let her cultivate any such—prudently and innocently of course; but by no means let her imagine that it was her duty to shut herself up like a nun.

And therewith the priest kindly dismissed her, telling her that she would find *la padrona* sitting up for her; and that she must make haste to go to bed, as she was to start before daybreak the next morning with Signor Paolo.

Giulia understood it all; and smiled to herself somewhat bitterly, as she thought how much trouble they were all taking to secure the object, which was her own as much as theirs.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CYPRESS IN THE PATH.

It was a walk of about two miles from the village of Santa Lucia to the farm house of Bella Luce—a charming walk down the valley by a little path through the fields, which took its way just above the steep part of the declivity. What has already been said with regard to the position of the farmhouse was equally true of the path in question. The upper ground above it rose in a gentle slope, but the side of the valley below it was much steeper; not so steep as to become a precipice, for it was all pasture land, but as steep as it could well be compatibly with such a purpose. The land on the upper side was mostly tillage and vineyard. Almost all the way after the little village was cleared, was through fields belonging to Bella Luce.

Giulia exchanged two or three “good nights” with the cottagers standing at their own open door, or returning homewards in the immediate neighbourhood of the village; but after she had cleared it, the solitude was as perfect as if she had had all the world to herself.

It was a lovely moonlight night. She knew every step of the way, and every tree she passed, as well as the furniture of her own chamber; and her sense of security was as complete, and would have been so at any hour of the day or night, as if she had been there. So she walked along, and in no wise hurrying, despite the priest's last admonition, and not insensible to the beauty of the scene and the hour, and to the sense of liberty and freedom arising from the entirety of the solitude.

It was the last time she thought, probably enough the last time for ever, that she should walk that path. She had loved Bella Luce well. Though all had not been happiness there, she was sad to leave it—to leave it most likely never to return. Who knew what might come of this new, strange life, so different, so vague, so full of unknown elements and imperfectly-conceived chances and changes? How anxious she had been for these two days to be over. They were over now. The dreaded danger was past. Yes, they had taken good care not to expose her to that. To make all sure, she was to start before daybreak. They need not have given themselves so much trouble. Beppo must have been in bed an hour or more. Fast asleep at that moment, doubtless. Was he sleeping? Did she honestly in her heart believe that he was tranquilly sleeping, knowing that he had seen her for the last time? No, she would have no affectation. She would be honest with herself,—honest as Beppo was. She knew that he was not sleeping; more likely would not sleep that night.

Poor Beppo! She knew that he was thinking of her that minute, restless in his bed, and counting the hours till she was to start and go away for ever. Well! It was now all over. She might think as tenderly of him as she would, now. She had fought her fight, and had conquered. Yes. Thank Heaven, she had conquered. She was glad—oh! so glad that it was over. She might own to herself now, how dearly, dearly she had loved him!—loved him most when most she had seemed to drive him from her. She marvelled how she had ever

found strength and courage to fight and conquer as she had done. And if—

She started suddenly, and stopped in her sauntering walk, bending her ear to listen. There was a very large old cypress of great age, which the Bella Luce people called the half-way tree, because it was just about an equal distance from them and the village. It stood right in the middle of the little path which swerved on either side to pass round it. The main, most used, and larger branch of the path passed on the upper side, where the slope of the valley was not steep. A smaller and very narrow passage crept round the huge old trunk on the other side, where the grassy slope fell away not more than six or eight inches from the root of the tree. No doubt, had there been no boys or goats at Santa Lucia, there would have been no trace of a path on this side.

It was as she neared this tree, that Giulia was startled by a sound, it seemed to her as of somebody hidden on the other side of the trunk of it. She paused a moment; but reflecting in the next, that probably some villager had fallen asleep there while resting on his way home, and that at all events there could be nothing that she need fear, she continued her walk. When, suddenly, as she came within a pace of the spot, and was about to pass on the main part of the path, Beppo stepped out from behind the trunk, and placed himself full in the centre of the broad division of the path.

Giulia, whose instant and sole impulse was to escape, made a dash at the narrow strip of uncertain path that passed on the other side of the tree, intending to run for it to the farm, and having very little doubt that she could outrun Beppo after his day's work.

But the grass was wet with dew, and moreover slippery with the dried pin-like leaves that fell from the cypress. Her foot slipped, and she would have rolled down the grassy slope, had not Beppo with a sudden bound to that side of the path, caught her with his arm round the waist, and placed her again on the path; but so as to be himself between her and Bella Luce. Having done so,

he took his arm from her, as hastily as if the touch of her had given him an electric shock.

The whole thing had been so instantaneous, that no word had till then passed between them. For a moment they stood looking at each other.

"Stand out of the path," said Giulia, then, with the tone and attitude and gesture that a Semiramis might have used to a slave rash enough to bar her way.

Beppo moved a hair's-breadth on one side, as if constrained against his will to obey her behest. But it was only a hair's-breadth; he still, in fact, barred the way, not only with his person, but with his hands, as he raised them, and said in a piteous voice :

"Giulia! oh, Giulia! will you leave me in this way?"

And Giulia saw in the moonlight that the whole of his stalwart frame was shaking with the intensity of his emotion as he spoke.

The fight was not, then, fought out yet; the victory not yet won; and if Giulia would win it, it behoved her to fight again, to fight now, and that well.

"What right have you to waylay me in this way?" she said; but her voice now shook, and was that of distress and sorrow, rather than of anger. "What right have you to come here to stop me?" she continued, with great difficulty preventing herself from bursting into tears. "It is not good of you. It is not kind. You must have known that if I had wished to speak to you, I should not have kept out of your way."

"It was your wish, then, to go from Bella Luce without saying one word of adieu,—one word of kindness! Oh, Giulia! Giulia! is it possible? Can it be that you wished and intended this?" and his strong, manly voice seemed nearer to sobbing than even her own, as he spoke.

"Of course I intended it! What did your father intend when he fixed to start before daybreak? What did your mother intend when she sent me up to the *Cura* to-day? What did the priest intend when he kept me

there till all at home were in bed, or ought to be? What did they all intend?"

"What do I care what they all intended? I thought only of you, Giulia; and I did think notwithstanding—notwithstanding all, that you would not have refused to speak to me—to part in kindness this last night. Oh, Giulia! what have I ever done, that you should hate me so?"

And as he said the words he clasped his hands together, and held them out towards her, and looked at her in a way that made the fight a very hard fight indeed to poor Giulia.

Nevertheless, she was still fully purposed to conquer. She made a mighty effort to crush down the rising tide of sobs, to still the tumultuous beating of the heart, that terribly threatened to become convulsive—(and if it had the battle would have been as good as lost)—and to assume the old tone in which she had so often answered him, and by which she had given him—and herself—so many a heartache.

"Hate you! What nonsense it is talking in that way, Beppo! You know as well as I do that I do not hate you. Why should I? We have always been very good friends; and should be so still, if you would not persist so stupidly in wanting to be something else."

"Something else? Yes; I do want something else, and something more. You know what I want, cousin Giulia."

"Yes; you want, like other big babies, just what you can't have. So now let me pass, and make haste home, or *la padrona* will be wondering what has become of me. I am really very angry with you for coming here to waylay me in this way. And pray what on earth shall you say to them at home?"—a little cold spasm shot through Giulia's heart as she said the last word—"I suppose, as usual, I shall get the credit of this piece of foolery."

"None of them know that I am out of the house, except Carlo. They think I am in bed and asleep," said Beppo, hangin^g his head.

"Except Carlo ! As if all the village would not know it to-morrow ! Carlo, indeed, for a confidant."

"I could not help it ; I hoped he would go to sleep, and that I could get out of the window without his being any the wiser. But he would not go to sleep."

"And a pretty story he will make to-morrow."

"I think not, Giulia. He wanted to stop my coming—said he would call up my father ; but I said a few words to him," continued Beppo, as a look came over him which Giulia had never seen on his good-humoured face before ; "and he did not say any more to prevent my coming ; and I do not think he will speak of it to anyone."

"It will be very unlike him, then. And what were the words you said to him, that produced so mighty an effect, pray ?"

"I told him," said Beppo, with the stern look that seemed to change all the character of his face, and speaking with a concentrated sort of calmness unnatural to him, "I told him that if he stirred from his bed I would knock his brains out against the wall ; and that if he ever breathed to any human soul that I had left the house, I would shoot him like a polecat."

"Beppo !" cried Giulia, in unfeigned astonishment and dismay, "you terrify me, and make me really hate you ;"—(she loved him at that moment better than she ever loved him before)—"I did not suppose it was in you to think such wicked, horrid thoughts."

"Giulia, I am desperate ! You make me desperate ; you make me feel as if neither my own life nor any other man's life were worth a straw. Giulia, say a word to me, look kindly on me, and I will be good and kind and gentle to all the world. Oh, Giulia, don't leave me in my despair and misery ! Give me some hope, Giulia ; some little hope, and it will save me !"

Certainly the fight was a very, very hard one. It was almost going against her ; and if Beppo could only have known how nearly it was going in his favour, he would have conquered. As it was, it was wholly impossible

for her to keep up the light and would-be easy tone she had attempted at first.

"Hope, Beppo," she said sadly; "what hope can I give you? Even supposing that I felt for you all that you would have me feel, what hope could I give you? Do you not know that there can be nothing between your father's son and the outcast pauper who has lived upon his charity?"

"Spare me, spare me, Giulia! Don't say words which make me feel towards my father as I would not feel. He is old; and when men get old they think more of money. But I would be patient; I would never contradict him, if I only knew that you loved me."

"But it is not only your father, Beppo. What would all the family say? What would the world say? Would they not say that the orphan who was taken in for charity had schemed to entrap the heir? Oh! I could not bear it. You could not bear it for me if you loved me, Beppo."

"If I loved you! *If* I loved you! Giulia, Giulia, it makes me mad to hear you. And to talk of what the people may *say*, when it is to me a question of life and death. Say! why they would say that Beppo Vanni's good luck was greater than he deserved—that there was not a man in all Romagna who might not envy him. Only give me the right to do it, only give me a hope that you may be brought to look on me, and trust me to drive the malignant sneers of any who dare sneer down their accursed throats. If you fear the world, Giulia, only let me stand between you and the world."

"It cannot be, Beppo," she said, shaking her head sadly. "It can never be. Let me go home."

"And leave me thus! Oh, Giulia, you cannot be so cruel. Think of my wretchedness when you are gone."

"And I am going to such happiness," said Giulia; and the tears began to flow from her eyes and betray themselves in her voice.

"Why should you not be happy? You will find

plenty to love you, and some one among them you can love," said Beppo, bitterly.

"Their love would be loathsome to me. I'll have no love," said Giulia, now sobbing beyond her power to conceal it. "No love, no love," she said amid her sobs, while a little nervous movement of her foot on the grass, and the convulsive wreathing together of her fingers, as she held them in front of her bosom, showed the extremity of her agitation; "no love," she repeated,—"save yours," was upon her tongue. She had all but said it. She felt as if she would have given worlds to say it: but she choked it down, and said instead, "Oh, Beppo, how can you make me so miserable?"

"I! I make you miserable!" said poor Beppo, in utter amazement.

"Yes; you do. You do make me miserable—by—by—by talking about other—other men making love to me. I hate them all—all I do!"

Oh, poor, honest, dull, simple-minded Beppo, he did not see the truth.

"I thought it was talking about loving you myself that made you angry," said he, in the extremity of perplexity.

"I hate that too," pouted Giulia, as she shot at him a glance from the corner of her eye that had almost the gleam of a smile in it, struggling out half-drowned in tears.

"But you said you did not hate me, Giulia," remonstrated he.

"No; I don't hate you, Beppo. But now I must go home directly."

"And you *do* hate all other men," said Beppo, pondering deeply, and more to himself than to Giulia.

"Do stand out of the way, Beppo, and let me go home. I must go directly, now this minute. Beppo, do you hear me?" she added, for Beppo appeared to be perfectly absorbed in the attempt to draw a conclusion from the different premises which had been afforded him.

"If you hate all other men, and don't hate me, I am

the only man you don't hate," said Beppo, proceeding cautiously to the construction of his syllogism, but with a strictly vigorous induction which would have done honour to an Aristotelian.

"I didn't say that," retorted Giulia, with her sex's instinctive rebellion against a logical necessity. "Come, let me pass. I won't stay talking with you here any longer."

"It's a great thing to know that you don't hate me," said Beppo, still meditatively, but looking into Giulia's face with wistful eyes.

"Well, be content with it then, and let me go home at once. The priest will tell *la Si'ora Sunta* what time I left the village, and then she will know that I must have stopped somewhere on my way. Let me go."

"Don't you think we ought to shake hands at parting, Giulia?" said Beppo, hanging his head, and timidly stretching out his hand a little towards her.

"Perhaps we ought—at parting," said Giulia; and her hand stole out from her side to meet his, while she turned her face away as coyly as if the threatened kiss of palm on palm had been the sacredest of love's mysteries.

Nor was the mountain nymph's instinct so far wrong. For as those two hands touched, an electric thrill shot through both frames, that made their breath come short, making Giulia feel as though she could faint.

"It could not be wrong, cousin Giulia," continued Beppo, very gently drawing her hand towards him; "it could not be wrong, since we *are* cousins, and since—you don't hate me, just at parting to give each other a cousinly kiss." He advanced his face a little, a very little, towards hers as he spoke.

She remained perfectly still, leaving her face in the most wholly open and defenceless position. But she said very decisively:

"No man shall ever kiss me, Beppo, except one that I love with all my heart and all my soul."

She seemed to speak determinedly enough; but yet

Beppo observed she did not take any steps whatever for withdrawing her face from the very dangerous and exposed position in which it was. Her eyes were fixed on the ground, her head was bent a little on one side, so that the rich brown and pink cheek was held up to the full incidence of the moonbeam; one hand was hanging listlessly by her side, the other was still imprisoned within his.

"But if I am the only man you don't hate, Giulia!" pleaded Beppo.

She made no answer, but the play of the moonlight on the rounded contour of her cheek showed that it was turned up just the least in the world more towards him; and still her eyes were fixed on the ground, so entirely off guard as to be of no use whatever in giving her notice of any menacing movement on his part. The opportunity was irresistible.

"I think, as cousins, at parting we ought," said Beppo, suddenly catching her round the waist, and meaning merely to have his share of that inviting cheek which the moonbeam was kissing. But somehow or other, from some little movement which she made to avoid the attack, his lips came down, not on the cheek, but full on hers. "Ah, Giulia! if you would be my own!" he whispered, as not till after a second or two she drew away her face from his.

"That can never, never be," she said, with a deep sigh and a wistful look into his face; . . . "and this," she added, hastily, "must never be again. And now farewell, Beppo. God bless you."

"Let me walk with you to the house."

"No! we part here. If we never meet again, I shall never, never, never forget the spot," she said with a little tremor in her voice. "Let me go. Good night, Beppo!"

And with a sudden movement she stepped past him, and saying again, "Good night! God bless you, Beppo!" she set off running along the path as fast as she could run.

Beppo flung himself down at the foot of the cypress-

tree, and remained there for some hours, immersed in attempts at working out the logical problem which had been submitted to him. He did not succeed at all to his satisfaction in obtaining any clear and distinct conclusion; but he nevertheless remained with a very strong conviction that his cousin spoke the truth in saying that she did not hate him.

Giulia arrived at the kitchen-door at Bella Luce quite out of breath with running. She saw that there was a light within it, and a little tap brought *la sposa*, who, as the priest had said, was patiently waiting for her, to open the door.

"His reverence has kept you late, child. It is time you were in bed!" said the mistress, letting her in.

"He had not time to speak to me all day. It was only just before I came away that he called me into his study," said Giulia.

"And I hope you'll be a good girl, and abide by all the good advice he gave you."

"I hope so, Si'ora Sunta."

"And now, child, you must make haste to bed. Vanni will call you in the morning. Good night, and good-bye, and I wish you good luck and happiness."

"Good-bye, Si'ora Sunta."

The next morning, before the sun had heaved his great disc clear of the Adriatic, Giulia was seated by the side of the farmer in his *calessino*, and Beppo, concealed by a corner of the house, was watching her departure with a full and heavy heart, though surely with a less heavy one than it had been before the meeting under the cypress-tree.

BOOK II.

AT FANO.

CHAPTER I.

LA SIGNORA CLEMENTINA DOSSI.

THE small episcopal and maritime city of Fano is situated on the flat sandy shore of the Adriatic, a little to the north of the equally episcopal and maritime city of Sinigaglia, and a little to the south of the equally episcopal and maritime cities of Pesaro and Rimini. The new railroad running in a direct line from Bologna to Ancona, a distance of about a hundred and twenty-five miles, passes through no less than ten episcopal cities, most of them situated on the coast. Notwithstanding, however, the original profession of St. Peter, and the honoured memory of that profession, which has always been preserved by the Church, it would seem as if episcopacy and maritime enterprise did not go hand in hand together. For these Adriatic cities, as the episcopal element in them has become more and more preponderating, have become less and less maritime.

A strong family likeness prevails in this group of neighbouring cities, but they have also their special cha-

raeteristics. Fano is one of the least unprepossessing among them to a stranger. It is not so dirty as Pesaro or Rimini, but it is still more sleepy. There are fewer mendicants in the streets, but then there are fewer living creatures altogether. The ecclesiastical establishments of Fano, comprising a wonderful assortment of convents and monasteries of both sexes, and of all sorts and colours, would seem to intimate that their spiritual interests were those uppermost in the minds of the inhabitants. And certainly the little town seems to have retired altogether from any active interest in any other matters.

Cities were placed by their founders on sea-coasts with a view to the various valuable advantages afforded them by the "water privilege," as the Americans say, of such a location. Yet Fano has not only wholly declined to avail itself of any such, but has taken care to make it manifest to the most cursory observation, that she owns no connection or even acquaintanceship with the ocean, her near neighbour. I take it that the notorious restlessness of the Adriatic was too much at variance with the habits of sleepy tranquillity cultivated by the men of Fano.

The little town is entirely surrounded by a lofty wall, in which one jealously small gate opens towards the coast. But even that does not afford the Fanesi any glimpse of the restless and sleepless monster which is so near them. The look-out from it is bounded at the distance of a few yards by a lofty ridge of sandhills, arid, parched, pale brown mounds, solitary and desolate-looking. And the stranger who, having learnt that the Adriatic was somewhere in the neighbourhood, should surmount these and make his way to the shore, at the distance of perhaps half a furlong from the city gates, would find himself in a solitude as complete as that of any mourner who ever went

ἀκέων παρὰ ἕνα πολυφλοίσβοιο θαλάσσης.

Fano and the Adriatic are forcedly neighbours; but they have agreed to see as little of each other as possible.

It seems absurd to anybody who has ever visited this very episcopal little city, to speak of a dull street in Fano; they are all so wonderfully dull. But still there are degrees. During the morning hours there *are* four or five old women sitting behind little vegetable stalls in the spacious grand piazza. (Fish? *Che vi pare?* when we are not on speaking terms with the sea! We eat salt fish brought from—Heaven knows where, and try to fancy ourselves an inland town.) And even during the hour of the sacred *siesta* there is a dog or two sleeping, or perhaps even mooning lazily about in that heart and centre of the city. There are a few shops, too, in the streets nearest to this centre, the owners of which will consent to part with an article or two from their small store, if you will put them in a good humour by dawdling and gossiping for half an hour first, and not attempt to obtrude commerce upon them too crudely and abruptly. And all this is life.

But there are streets in Fano—aristocratic streets of enormous palaces—where no such symptoms of life are ever met with. These are the dull streets. A stray dog in these streets would bowl himself into a decline because of the intensity of the solitude! Long stretches of blank windowless wall of enormous height, shutting in convent gardens; other still loftier walls, with little windows high up in them, fitted with troughs in front of them to prevent the inmates from distracting their minds by gazing into the too tempting world with all its pomps and vanities in the street below; immense palaces, so hugely large as to puzzle all conjecture at the motive which could have led to their construction, with handsome heavy stone mouldings and cornices around the windows, whole ranges of which may be seen boarded up with rough planks: these things make up the quiet and aristocratic streets of Fano.

And it was in one of the most quiet and most aristocratic of these that the Signora Clementina Dossi lived.

Not that *la* Clementina Dossi, properly speaking, belonged to the aristocratic classes of society, though the

position she now occupied was so eminently respectable as to entitle her to admittance among the easy-going aristocracy, which mostly confined its exclusiveness and its prerogative to occasions of high state and public solemnities, and the matrimonial alliances of its sons and daughters.

Forty years or so before the date of Giulia Vanni's arrival in Fano, Tina Tratti, as she was then called, had been well and favourably known through a tolerably large circuit of the cities of Italy as an actress of no little talent. She had been a beauty in her day, specially celebrated for her sylph-like figure, and had for several years of her spring-tide flitted from city to city, the favourite of garrisons and universities, and the queen of a whole galaxy of green-rooms.

Tina Tratti, however, amid her flittings and her flirtings, and her triumphs on and behind the scenes, had kept a sufficiently shrewd eye to the main chance, and had been a sufficiently valuable component part of the successive companies to which she had belonged, to have laid by a very snug little competence by the time her spring-tide was over. The period had arrived by that time, however, when the same shrewd appreciation of the world and its ways, which, amid all the "bohemianism" of her early days, had caused one record at least of that pleasant time—her banker's book—to be such as could be afterwards perused with satisfaction, led her to the decision that it was time to "regularise" her position in the world. She did so by marrying Signor Amadeo Dossi, the well-known *impresario*, who was not above ten years her senior, who had also laid by a snug little fortune, and who, in finding a wife, and retiring from work, was well pleased to meet with so charming a person as *La Tina*, whose good sense led him to think that she would be duly aware of all that ought to accompany "regularising her position," and whose little fortune was a very pleasant and convenient addition to his own.

So they quitted the theatre together, and came to settle at Fano. And Signor Dossi had never had reason to

repent the step he had taken. The ex-sylph Tina Tratti had made him a very good wife during the remainder of his days, which had come to a conclusion some fifteen years before the time at which her history touches that to be narrated in these pages.

In taking a husband, the actress had looked to the regularising of her worldly position, as has been said, and had successfully achieved that object. When she became a widow, however, it appeared to her that the time had come for a further regularising process. She now inclined to regularise her spiritual position, as regarded the stage to which the next shifting of the scene would introduce her. And she set about doing so with the same practical, purpose-like good sense which had presided over her previous metamorphosis. She made selection of a well-recommended "director," became a member of one or two sisterhoods, made certain little changes in her style of dress, was not niggard in "benefactions," was constant at morning mass in all weathers, and invited more priests and rather fewer officers to her house than had been the case during the lifetime of her husband. With regard to more intimately personal changes, there really was not very much to be done. She took up a copy of the "Confessor's Manual," and ran over the authorised list of sins, with their weights and degrees of blackness. And she could find but one which seemed to stand in her way at all. *La gola!** *La* Signora Clementina *did* like a good dinner, and was specially fond of a bit of something nice for supper. But, after all, the first glance showed that "*la gola*" was in the list of venial and not in that of mortal sins. And a consultation upon the subject with her new "director" showed her that, properly managed, it was so very, very venial a sin, that really there were some virtues which seemed more dangerous. There were the ordinances of the Church respecting certain days and certain meats, it is true. But then the Church knew that fasting was not adapted to all

* The technical theological term for "gluttony."

constitutions. There were dispensations; and really, on the whole, very cheap. The Church had no wish to injure anybody's health. It would be a sin to do so. And if, after all was said and done, the tender conscience of so exemplary a member of the flock as *la Signora Dossi* should still give her the slightest uneasiness, why, there was the confessional!—what for, save for the ease and comfort of tender consciences? Yes, but about repenting? “If one knows that one is looking forward to one's little partridge *à la Milanaise* at night?” suggested *la Clementina*, doubtfully. Then it was that the director was put on his mettle, and showed that he was worth his hire. He plunged at once with the utmost intrepidity into a turbid ocean of metaphysics, splashing about long Latin words that sounded to the patient as if he were exorcising a whole legion of devils; distinguishing; dividing mental acts with a dexterity of scalpel equal to the highest feats of moral surgery; striking the boundary line between foreknowledge and intention with masterly precision; taking human volition in his teeth, and shaking it to that degree that it was a mere tangle of rags when he had done with it; and, finally, convincing his much edified though utterly puzzled hearer, that she might look forward to her partridge *à la Milanaise* as fondly as she pleased, with the safest possible conscience.

The *Signora Clementina Dossi*, when she thus regularised for the second time, was no longer the sylph-like creature that she had been some twenty-five or thirty years before. On the contrary, she had become remarkably stout. And what was odd was that she seemed now to be as fond of calling attention to this latter peculiarity, as she had once been proud of her as remarkably slender figure. She had preserved a girdle which she had formerly worn, and hung it up in her drawing-room by the side of one which showed the circumference of her present portly person. The former, which had girdled the unregularised *Tina Tratti*, measured some twenty inches; the latter, showing the extent to which worthy *Clementina Dossi* had prospered under her twofold pro-

cess of regularising, exhibited a length of some sixty. *La Dossi* was very fond of pointing to these two records, especially if any slim young girls came into her room. She would make them try on the ex-sylph's girdle, and then say, "That is what I was when I was your age, my dear ! but t'other is the girth of me now ! The Lord has been graciously pleased to increase me threefold !"

And the opportunities for such experiments and warnings were not rare, for young people liked *la Dossi*. She was goodnature itself. She had still pretty, gentle, dove-like eyes, and the complexion of her large fat face was almost as delicately pink and white and as smooth as it had ever been. She had not a wrinkle in it—as, indeed, it would have been difficult for her skin to find the means of making one, so entirely filled out was it by fat. Her small mouth, too, and still perfect teeth, had suffered but little from the effects of time. But underneath the sweet-tempered looking mouth there was a double chin of the most tremendous proportions.

All the young people liked her ; and though, as has been said, the complexion of the society which she was wont to gather around her was in some degree modified after her husband's death, the more mundane element was not altogether excluded. (It had been at her house, for example, now I think of it, that *Lisa Bartoldi* had first met Captain *Giacopo Brilli*.) There was nothing ascetic about her temper or her devotion. She had no sort of notion that because she was virtuous there were to be no more cakes and ale in the world. She thought, on the contrary, that youth was the proper period of enjoyment, and was desirous, to the utmost of her power, to contribute to enabling them to make the most of it.

La Signora Clementina Dossi inhabited at the time of which we are speaking a portion of the first floor of an enormous palace, the rest of which was untenanted. The residence was one capable of surrounding with legions of blue devils any tenant capable of harbouring such imps. But Italians are little troubled with blue devils ; and to *la Clementina* such devils, unrecognised by her spiritual

advisers, were entirely unknown. She had for a small rent as many vast lofty rooms as she chose to occupy. There was no noise in the street to disturb her daily *siesta*, or mar the comfortable process of her digestion, and the palace was the next door to the church she attended, and to which her "director" belonged.

La Signora had lost her one servant, who had married, and she was in want of another. That was the simple statement of the case, and all Signor Sandro's euphemisms about a companion, and *douceur*, and such like, were all mere bosh, intended to make the proposal acceptable to the farmer's family pride—a sentiment which many an Italian peasant nourishes in as high a degree as any long-descended noble.

Nevertheless, the character and kindly nature of Signora Dossi made much of what he had said as good as true. The distance between employers and their servants is much less in Italy than among ourselves, especially between a mistress and her female servants; and both the position and the temper of Signora Dossi were calculated to make the connection in her case really more like one of companionship than anything else. She did most of her own cooking herself—did it *con amore*, and with as much skill as pleasure. It was, after the religious duties of the morning had been attended to, the great occupation of her day; and Giulia, if she profited in no other way by the engagement the attorney had made for her, was sure to carry away with her from *la Dossi*, whenever she might leave her, a very useful knowledge of the mysteries of the kitchen. *La Dossi* had no greater pleasure than teaching the young idea to shoot in this direction—unless, indeed, it were in discussing the results of their united labours;—a part of the business in which she very commonly invited the partner of her toils to share, the more especially as she loved to discuss also at the same time all the *rationale* of the process of preparation.

Such was the mistress, and such the house, to which Giulia was coming, by the recommendation of Signora Dossi's old friend, Signor Sandro Bartoldi.

CHAPTER II.

THE PALAZZO BOLLANDINI.

FARMER VANNI, when he arrived with Giulia at the attorney's house in Fano, did not seem much inclined to accompany her to that of her new mistress. He did not see that he could do any good, he said. The fact was partly that he was shy, as the peasantry always are with respect to the people of the city—even those of a social rank corresponding to their own—although they are at the same time most thoroughly convinced that they (the countrymen) are the superiors in every really good quality, and partly that he did not care to see how far Signor Sandro's representations as to the exceptionally dignified character of the situation were strictly in accordance with the fact. He had a certain amount of doubt upon the subject, and preferred to remain in such a state of ignorance upon it as should justify him in boasting now and hereafter on all fitting occasions that no Vanni had ever been in service.

So he and Signor Sandro, and his daughter Lisa, and Giulia, dined together at the attorney's house; the farmer started on his way back to Bella Luce, and then Signor Sandro took Giulia with him to her new home. He had

never ceased during dinner time eulogising Signora Dossi, and speaking in the most glowing terms of Giulia's good fortune in having obtained a position in every way so desirable.

Giulia, however, drew more consolation from a few minutes' conversation which she had found an opportunity for with the gentle Lisa. Of course Lisa was in the first instance an object of no little interest to her. She was perfectly well aware of the wishes and hopes of her father and of Beppo's father with regard to them both. She saw her now for the first time; and every daughter of Eve will perfectly well understand the quick, sharp glance with which Giulia scanned, measured, surveyed, and reckoned her up. Giulia was not strongly impressed with any high idea of her own personal perfections. The village lads had smiled at her. But Italian peasants do not much pay compliments, except by falling in love with the object that appears to them to merit them. She knew that Beppo had paid her this compliment, but then that might be because they were so much thrown into the way of each other. Nevertheless, her survey of poor pale little Lisa was satisfactory to her. It seemed to her quite as conceivable that a man should fall desperately in love with a little white mouse as with Lisa Bartoldi.

Lisa looked also at Giulia with no little curiosity. The feeling was a different one on her side. She had heard much, as we know, from Beppo about her, and she had every reason to wish that he might be constant to his passion for her. As far as that went, the result of her inspection was satisfactory also. But it was not in the nature of womankind that it should be wholly so. Poor Lisa felt too unmistakably the total eclipse into which this magnificent Diana of the mountains—magnificent in stature, in colour, in development, in vigour—threw her faded and modest attractions. And then Brilli would see her—of course he would in the house of *la Dossi*; who could tell with what result? Heaven grant, at least, that Giulia might be sternly faithful to Beppo. Faithful to him! But Beppo had declared that Giulia cared

nothing for him. She understood very well what his father's purpose had been in bringing this superb creature away from Bella Luce. Alas! might it not turn out that his object might be served by it in yet another manner, if she should appear as lovely in Giacopo Brilli's eyes as she did in hers?

Nevertheless, the two girls made friends; for Lisa's nature was a gentle one, and Giulia was in a frame of mind in which any proffered kindness was very acceptable to her. They made friends; and Giulia was in a great degree reassured as to the lot that was awaiting her, by Lisa's account of Signora Dossi and her household. She fully confirmed all that her father had said about *la Clementina's* kindness and indulgence. She explained to her her new mistress's mode of life; told her the leading facts of her former history, and seemed to consider her on the whole as rather a butt for fun and quizzing, though the best and kindest old soul in the world.

"You'll have to try her girdle on, Signorina Giulia, before you have been in her house half-an-hour. You won't be able to put it on. I can; but then I am such a mitc compared to you!"

"Put her girdle on!" said Giulia, in great amazement; "what on earth do you mean?"

"Oh! not the girdle she wears now. That would be a very different thing. You will see. It is a girdle she keeps, that she wore once when she was a favourite on the stage. She had a very beautiful figure, it seems,—very slender; and this girdle shows what she was then. She always makes all the girls try it on. Very few can wear it; I can," repeated poor Lisa for the second time; "but then I am such a little bit of a thing! Though I don't think *la Dossi* can ever have been much taller than me. They used to call her the 'Sylph.' And you'll see what she is now. So!" said Lisa, stretching her arms to their full extent. "And she keeps a girdle, such as she wears now, by the side of the other, to show the difference. Oh, she is such a queer old creature! but as good as gold!"

"Is she a little—?" and Giulia tapped her forehead with her fore-finger significantly.

"Oh, dear, no!" answered Lisa, laughing; "only funny. I know," she added, mysteriously, and in a lower voice, "why it is that my father and Signor Vanni have settled for you to go and live there. Don't you know?"

Giulia was for a moment inclined to be angry at this unceremonious allusion to matters that to her were sacred, and wrapped in the secrecy of her inmost heart. But a moment's reflection showed her both the uselessness and the injustice of being offended at poor little Lisa's friendly-intended confidences.

"Yes, Signorina Lisa," she said, sadly, "I know what I am sent away from Bella Luce for."

"But you don't mind it much, do you? I don't think I should, if I were you. And you know, I suppose, why my father wanted it?"

"I suppose so," said Giulia, while a feeling of startled surprise at the suddenness and unreserve of her new acquaintance's mode of treating subjects which she only approached shyly and timorously, even in her communings with her own heart, mingled with her sadness.

"To make a match of it between me and Beppo, you know. But that will never be! Don't you be afraid of that! Beppo is for you, and for nobody else. He and I quite understand one another!"

"But—but, excuse me, Signorina Lisa," stammered Giulia, almost speechless from the extremity of her astonishment; "may I ask if you understood from Beppo that—that—I had ever accepted his addresses?"

"He, he, he!" giggled Lisa. "No. He said that you would have nothing to say to him. Poor Beppo!—he, he, he! But, between ourselves, we know what that means. Surely you have played the cruel long enough, Signorina Giulia! and poor Beppo absolutely adores you! He is desperate; he is indeed. And, hark! in your ear," dropping her voice to a whisper as she spoke, "you may see him as often as you like at *la Dossi's* house. Lord

bless you! she is not the one to keep young people asunder. It is there that I see—somebody!”

“But suppose I don’t want to see—anybody?” returned Giulia, half sadly and half satirically.

“Oh! come now, Signorina Giulia, let us be friends! I am sure I wish to. And we can help one another,” said Lisa, in a voice of remonstrance.

“I am very much obliged to you, Signorina Lisa, for wishing to be friends with me. It is very kind of you. If I can be of any use to you, I shall be very happy;—you have only to command me! But—but—but I was quite in earnest in—in—what I said about myself.”

The two girls found great difficulty in understanding each other, in consequence of the vast distance from each other at which they were placed, not so much by the intrinsic and original difference in their two natures, as by that of their social position, and the mental training derived thence. The contrasted manner in which they felt and spoke on the great subject, which is more important and interesting than any other that can occupy a young girl’s mind at their time of life, was exhibiting the different tendencies of the town and country nature. It is true that Giulia’s was the deeper, richer and more earnest nature; but that was only in the second place the cause of the notable difference between them. It is the denizen of the town who runs out in fluent, abundant and ready talk. The peasant nature is more reserved, more inarticulate. Less accustomed to constant contact and companionship with others, the *contadino*, and, perhaps, in a still greater degree, the *contadina*, is unready with the tongue, reserved in temper, shy, modest in thought as well as in word, unable to get readily spoken even that which she would desire to speak. It is the town girl who pins her heart upon her sleeve, makes gossip matter of the most delicate secrets, and is ready at a moment’s notice to discuss them with any street corner or door-step female friend.

To Giulia, Lisa’s mode of speaking was shocking and painful, as well as extraordinary. She could not under-

stand her. The manner in which she plunged into the sacred places—the innermost holy of holies of Giulia's guarded heart, seemed to her an impertinence; and the way in which she dealt with her own secrets almost an indecency. She was at a loss whether to think her worthless or half-witted.

"How do you mean in earnest about what you said of yourself? What *did* you say?" replied Lisa, quite unconscious of the slightest indiscretion.

"I said that I had no particular wish to—to—to see—a—anybody at the house of *la* Signora Dossi," returned Giulia, casting down her eyes.

"Oh, don't talk in that way! There's nobody to hear but ourselves. You don't really mean that you don't care for poor Beppo. I can hardly believe that. I should be very sorry. And even if you did not, it would be reason the more why you should wish to see somebody else;" said Lisa, reflectively. "You are not—?" she said suddenly, completing her phrase by pantomimically taking an invisible rosary from the side of her dress, where it would have hung from her girdle, if she had worn one, and moving her fingers and lips as if she were going through the exercise of "telling her beads."

"Oh, no!" said Giulia, laughing in spite of herself; "not that at all."

It was the only conceivable theory on which Lisa could explain the case of a girl, who neither had a lover, nor yet was anxious to take the ordinary means towards having one. There was, however, one other means of explaining Giulia's conduct;—it might be fear, and over-caution.

"Well, then," she returned, "we ought to understand each other. You don't suppose that I should say a word to my father! And what's more, let me whisper in your ear, *la* Dossi won't say a word either. She never tells tales,—had too many secrets of her own to keep once upon a time, I suppose. And she's too good a creature. Lord bless you! Papa thinks she tells him everything. So she does, about her money and property, and such things. But—not matters which don't concern him. Tell me,

Giulia dear," she added, sliding coaxingly up to her, putting her arm round her waist, and looking up with a roguish smile into her face, "you do care for Beppo, don't you?"

"But what does it signify, Signorina Lisa, whether I care for him or not?" said poor Giulia, thus forced against her will into a half-confidence; "you know, even if I did, and he loved me ever so well, there could never be anything between us."

"What! because of the old ones? Bah!—whish—sh—sh!" said Lisa, prolonging her hissing expletive, and vibrating the fingers of one extended hand, in a manner expressing to Italian perceptions the most intense derision and contempt. "Lord bless you!—now-a-days they can't shut us up in prisons—no—nor make nuns of us either," continued the well-instructed city maiden; "you have nothing to do but stick to it."

Giulia felt an irresistible repugnance to attempting to make Lisa understand what were the feelings that really did place, to her mind, an insuperable bar between her and Beppo. It would have been better for her peace of mind, perhaps, if she had done so; for the light worldly wisdom and town-bred ridicule with which Lisa would have treated her scruples, might have to a certain degree been a useful corrective of Giulia's highminded but exaggerated pride. She felt it impossible for her, however, to do so. She turned the conversation, therefore, by reverting to the very natural subject of the life which awaited her with Signora Dossi.

"She does not keep any other servant, does she?" asked Giulia.

"No, only one; but you won't find that you have any very hard work to do. I should think you would find it best not to have any one else in the house to interfere with you."

"But you say she has people at her house?"

"Oh, yes, very often!—not regular parties, you know. But there are always people running in and out. *La Dossi* likes it. I think the poor old soul would *annoiare*

herself to death if she had not people about the house. She can't go about herself much, you know."

"Why not?" asked Giulia.

"Why not! Wait till you see, and then you will know why not. Lord bless you! it's as much as she can do to walk to the church next door every day."

"Is she very religious?" asked Giulia.

"Yes, very—in a quiet way. But she don't bother other people with it. She thinks it will come to their turn soon enough."

"But with so many people about the house, and one servant to do everything, how shall I ever be able to get through?"

"Oh! you will do very well. She is not like a *gran Signora dell' alto ceto*,* *la Dossi*. She does much of the work herself. She lives half in the kitchen; and you'll live half in the drawing-room. She would not have any common servant girl, look you! So that was how *babbo* came to think of you, you see."

To a certain extent, then, what the lawyer had said about the exceptional nature of the position he was proposing to "a Vanni" was founded in truth.

And then Signor Sandro himself came in from seeing his guest off on his return to Bella Luce; and announced that he was ready to accompany *la Signorina Giulia* to the house of his friend *la Signora Dossi*, and that it was time to be going.

So Giulia and the attorney set off together, *Lisa* having promised to see her again before long in her new home, and proceeded to the house of *la Dossi*, while Signor Sandro administered a lecture on the manner in which she was to behave towards her mistress, and on her own good fortune in being received into such a house.

It cannot be expected that our poor mountain nymph, fresh from the Apennine, should enter her new abode without much misgiving. Giulia felt not a little at the

* A grandee—great lady of the highest class.

unexpected magnificence of the palace at which Signora Sandro stopped.

"Does *la* Signora Dossi live here?" she asked, with considerable awe.

"Yes; here we are! This is the Palazzo Bollandini. The Marchese lives at Rome. *La* Dossi lives on the first floor. There are very few other tenants in the house."

So saying, he led the way up the enormous staircase; and Giulia was more astonished than ever at the magnificence of her mistress's lodging. It was a huge wide staircase, built of yellow Travertina stone, with the steps so easy and shallow that it would have been no difficult feat to ride up it on horseback. The immense panelled walnut-wood folding doors, with chased gilt bronze handles in the middle of each of them, were on a scale of magnificence to match, and Giulia opened her simple eyes wider and wider as these splendours revealed themselves to her.

A small bit of greasy twine, passed through a gimlet-hole in one of these grand doors, by way of a bell-pull, however, struck the first note of the descending scale, which connected the ancestral magnificence of the Bollandini of former generations with the habits and style of modern life at Fano. Signor Sandro and his companion had to wait a long time before the application of the former to the bit of twine—performed, as Italians invariably do, with a whole succession of pulls, as if he were intent on ringing a peal—produced any result.

Signor Sandro was neither surprised nor impatient. He knew that there was probably no one inside, save *la* Clementina herself,—that she travelled slowly, and that she had a long way to travel.

At last, however, the door was opened; and wide as its aperture was, it disclosed a portion only of the still ampler person of the lady of the mansion. There stood *la* Signora Dossi, the ex-sylph, firmly planted on both feet, so as to assign to each of them its fair share of the work of supporting her person, in the attitude generally adopted by persons of her inches—of circumference.

There she stood, rather out of breath, but beaming with good nature and good humour.

"Signora Clementina," said the little attorney, bowing still outside the door, for it did not seem to occur to the ex-sylph that the doorway was still as effectually closed by her own person as if she had not opened it, "here is the young person of whom I spoke to you. She came from Bella Luce this morning; and so I brought her off to you myself at once."

"Come in! come in! Signor Sandro; and bring in your young friend, who is to be my friend too!" said *la Dossi*, in a small piping voice that contrasted ludicrously with her appearance, turning round as she spoke by means of three separate steps, and then waddling back into the vast hall into which the magnificent doors opened.

It was a really grand apartment, loftier than the rest of the suite of rooms that opened off it, of great size and admirable proportions, with a carved coffered ceiling showing remains of gilding, and a half-obliterated painting of gods and goddesses in the centre. It was lighted by three large windows looking on to the street, and paved with square slabs of the same yellow Travertina stone of which the staircase was built. On the wall opposite to the entrance there hung an enormous escutcheon, on which the Bollandini arms were emblazoned; in one far corner of the huge hall there stood an old sedan-chair, with the scroll ornaments about the top, and the carved mouldings around its panels, which showed it to be the production of the last century; and there were four high-backed, square-built, leathern arm-chairs, with plain flat wooden arms, and ornaments of gilt carving surmounted by coronets on either side of the high strait backs, which as clearly belonged to a yet earlier period. These were placed, two against the opposite wall under the huge escutcheon, and two against the wall in which the door of entrance was, on the left-hand of it. For the door was nearly in the corner, near the street, with the three windows to the right of one coming in. There was

another door to match in the other corner on the same side ; but that was only a mock door, for uniformity's sake. There were other two similar doors on the opposite side,—that, namely, on which the escutcheon hung ; but these led to parts of the palace not in the occupation of Signora Dossi, and were locked up. In the middle of the fourth side, opposite to the windows, was another similar door, which led to the apartment inhabited by the ex-sylph.

And the huge escutcheon, which belonged to the sixteenth century, and the eighteenth century sedan-chair, and the four seventeenth century arm-chairs, were the only bits of furniture of any kind in the room.

Nevertheless it was there that *la* Dossi chose to receive her visitors ; for she waddled no further than to the nearest of the arm-chairs in question, and there sat down, leaving her guest to occupy the one opposite to her, some forty feet distant, or to remain standing in front of her, at his pleasure. He selected the latter alternative.

“So this is *la* Giulia ! Per Dio ! what a creature ! God forgive me for swearing ! *Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tunc—o—m !*” (The compensatory formula was uttered with the utmost rapidity—all except the last word, which was prolonged in a sort of penitential whine. *La* Dossi was repentant for having been surprised into swearing ; but she had a feeling that the good deed she had performed as *per contra*, left on the whole a balance in her favour on the transaction.) “Why this is a Juno, not a parlour-maid, let alone kitchen ! My dear, I shall be afraid of you ! I shall have to wash all the dishes myself ! How she would bring the house down as Semiramide ! You should be on the stage, my dear ; you should indeed !”

“I trust you will find *la* Giulia quite as well fitted for mere every-day work, my dear madam. I have no doubt that you will soon get used to one another. Giulia, my good girl, you will find *la* Signora Dossi a kind and considerate mistress. Make her your friend, and you will find her a valuable one. You must remember,

Signora, that Giulia has lived all her life in the country ; and you will have to teach her many things. But you will make allowances ; and I am sure that you will find her anxious to please. And now I must run away, for I have people from the country to see me about this troublesome conscription business at four. All the country is going mad about it, it seems to me ; and the people are thinking of nothing but exemptions and substitutes. Good-bye, Signora. Good-bye, Giulia."

"Shut the door after him, Giulia. There ; now we can talk, and make acquaintance. How fond the men are of preaching ! They are all alike in that. Have not you found them so, eh ? Ah ! but it is not preaching they give *you*, I'll be bound. That will come by-and-bye. Did you leave many broken hearts up at Bella Luce when you came away, eh ?"

"Signora !—"

"Did you, now ? Half the village, I should think. You are monstrously handsome, Giulia ! But I suppose you don't want an old woman to tell you that. There's plenty of a different sort to whisper that in your ear. And small blame to them. And what about cousin Beppo ?"

"Signora !" exclaimed Giulia, in a voice made up of two parts indignation to four parts of supplication, and twenty parts of astonishment.

"Well ! and ought not I to know all about it ? Am not I to be your mistress, and your protector, and counsellor and friend ? Hey ! do you think I have not heard all about Beppo and you ? Do you think I don't know what old Sandro has put you here for ? But don't you be afraid. And don't stand there looking as if you were struck speechless. Did not Lisa tell you I knew it all ?"

"Lisa said that you were very kind," faltered Giulia.

"Well, then, don't you be afraid of me. Why, I've been in love, girl, before you were ever born or thought of. And Tina Dossi is not the one to put a spoke in a

true lover's wheel. Never was, and never will be, per——*Ave Maria, gratiâ plena, Dominus, taycoo—oo—oo—m.*" (*La Dossi*, it will be observed, conscientiously and honourably paid the fine for the intention, even though the sin was not consummated. But she put down a proportionably large balance on the creditor side of the account.) "Now come along in and see what there is for dinner. Give me a hand to help me up. Pull away!—that's it," said *la Dossi*, slowly rising to her feet, in obedience to a vigorous pull of *Giulia's* stalwart arm.

"Well done! You're a capital one at that, any way. You would not think, *Giulia*, that I was once as active and lissom and slenderer than you! Yes—a good bit slenderer. But then I was smaller altogether. They used to call me the Sylph. I look like it, don't I?"

And so chattering, she waddled across the wide stone floor of the hall to the door in the middle of the further wall, and led *Giulia* into the inner rooms of her habitation. From the hall they passed into a very small ante-room, very imperfectly lighted only by a borrowed light, where there were two other doors, one fronting the great hall, leading into a sitting-room, and one on the left hand, leading into a snug little room, once a store-room for linen, but fitted up as a kitchen for *la Dossi's* special convenience.

"There's my sitting-room," she said, throwing open the door of it, and showing a tolerably well-furnished but rather bare-looking room, totally devoid of any sign of any sort of occupation or employment; but garnished with sundry prints of the ex-sylph, representing her in the various characters and costumes which had made her fame and fortune in the days of her sylph-hood; among which, suspended on the wall in a place of honour, *Giulia's* quick eye caught sight of the two contrasted belts hanging side by side, like the geographical representations of the shortest and longest rivers in the world; "and there," she continued, pointing to a door at one side of

the further wall, "is my bed-room; and there," indicating a similar door on the other side of the same wall, "is yours. There we are, cheek by jowl, my dear. So you are in safe keeping, you see. Only the worst is," and she winked at Giulia, who thereupon coloured up, though she could not have told why,—“the worst of it is, that I sleep like a stone two hours every day, from two to four, let alone all night, and should not hear if there were a dozen men in the great hall out there. But you are a good girl, and would not do anything wrong, I know. And this is the kitchen,” she continued, in a tone which seemed to indicate that she considered that to be by far the most important part of her habitation; “I generally eat here, unless I have anybody particular with me. It is very comfortable, and the things are hotter, you know. My hour is one o’clock every day, except Sundays. On Sunday I dine at three; so that the girl may always go to mass with me, and have time to make the soup afterwards. And then we have a mouthful of supper at eight. I do like a bit of supper. *Ave Maria, gratiâ plena, Dominus tunc—oo—oo—m!*” (The extra *oo—oo* showed that this was the weak point in *la* Signora Dossi’s conscience.) “And now come, and let us look after the dinner. I would not ask Don Cirillo to come in and have a bit to-day, because I had no maid to help me. I suppose you don’t know much about cooking yet?”

Giulia rehearsed her small list of capabilities in this department, but *la* Dossi shook her head, saying, “Well, you will soon learn. Where there is a will there is a way. And it is a pleasure to teach a willing scholar. Now look here——”

So Giulia received there and then her first lesson in city cookery; and was thus installed into her new mode of life.

And then the mistress and the maid proceeded together to demolish the work of their own hands, amid the critical remarks and dissertations of the elder lady, who sat the while in a huge arm-chair provided specially *ad hoc*, while the younger, besides eating her own dinner,

did the locomotive part of the business of the table.

And before the meal was over, Giulia felt quite at home, and intimate with her mistress, and *la* Dossi had coaxed out of her the entire truth as to all her feelings and perplexities in the matter of cousin Beppo.

CHAPTER III.

THE GREAT FEAR.

SIGNOR SANDRO BARTOLDI, after leaving Giulia at the Palazzo Bollandini, had returned home to see people from the country about the conscription, he said. The whole country, he declared, seemed to be going out of its senses about it, and everybody, especially the country-people, were wanting information on the subject, the communal authorities respecting the duties which the law required of them, and the young men and their families respecting all the possible grounds of exemption, and the chances and cost of finding substitutes. Subsequently the government took this matter of finding substitutes into its own hands, naming a fixed sum at which the conscript might buy himself off. But at the time in question substitutes could only be had by private arrangement and bargain, and the trade of procuring them gave rise to a great many frauds and abuses.

This dreaded measure had been threatened and looked forward to with the utmost aversion; had been discussed and grumbled over for many months past; and now at last it was come. The law had been duly passed, proclamation throughout the country had been made, and all

the requisite notices served on the authorities of the different communes. The mode of carrying out the measure was as follows :—

The number of men which the province is required to furnish, in due proportion to its population, having been fixed, and this amount having been notified to the authorities of the provincial capital, the mayor and syndics of the different communes received orders to return a full and complete list of all the male population of their jurisdictions within the legal age. The lists are to include *all*, without reference to any claims for exemption. These are afterwards preferred, examined, and allowed, if clearly good, by the authorities of the provincial capital. No exemptions, however, on the ground of physical unfitness are admitted on this first scrutiny, except such as are absolutely notorious, palpable, and unmistakable ; as, for instance, in the case of a hunchback, or a man with one leg.

When the communal lists have been thus sent in,—and of course, the interest of all concerned, and the mutual jealousies of those liable to be drawn, are a guarantee for their completeness,—a day is appointed for the drawing, in the presence of the magistrates, with every provision to ensure fairness, and with all publicity, in the capital of the province. But, as the whole mass of the population (within the prescribed ages) has been submitted to this drawing, and as it is certain that a very considerable proportion of those drawn will be rejected as unfit for military service, this ceremony is by no means decisive of the lot of many of those who are anxiously awaiting the award of their destiny. Thus, if five hundred men are required, he who has drawn No. 501 is, if he be medically unexceptionable, as sure of having to serve as if he had drawn No. 1.

It will easily be understood, therefore, how sharp and anxious an interest is prolonged during the time that elapses between the drawing and the medical visit ; what inquiries, what speculations, what anxious investigations into the previous health of this or that individual, what

hunting-up of evidence, what canvassing of medical men.

The proportion of men rejected is considerable in every province of Italy; but it is much larger in some than in others; larger also, as might be expected, in the towns than in the rural districts. Romagna is not one of the provinces in which the rejection is heaviest. But there is another circumstance which may diminish the number of those who have drawn bad numbers,—*i. e.*, numbers within that of the quota of men required, and which may then affect the fate of those who come next on the roll—desertion! That is the time for desertion; that anxious fortnight or so, between the drawing and the inspection. And of course it is the able-bodied men who desert. And this source of failure cannot be calculated on like that arising from medical objections. And in this respect, also, there is a considerable difference between one province and another. And if the rich and healthy Romagnole hills and plains gave a light rate of medical rejections, the desertion rate was specially heavy there, for the reasons which were assigned in the first part of this story.

And the whole interest attaching to that terrible day of the inspection and final making up of the roll, immediately after which the conscripts have to join their dépôts, is not confined to the simple ascertaining that this or that man is clearly unfit for military duty, as perhaps ought to be the case. Another element enters to increase the incertitude and complicate the interest.

The medical commission which examines the proposed conscripts, is composed of the medical officers attached to the military administration, and the medical men employed by the respective communes. Now these two component parts of the medical board are swayed by diametrically opposed objects and interests. The object of the colonel or other officer, who is always present, and of *his* medical men, is to obtain the flower and pick of the whole population. He wants, not only men capable of serving, but the finest and best men. Hence the object of him and his

medical supporters is to reject on the smallest possible grounds. The desire of the communal authorities on the other hand, of *their* medical men, and of the population generally, is to protect those who have drawn the better or higher numbers, to limit the suffering and the discontent within as narrow a circle as may be, and not to extend them to those who have had reasonable ground to think that they had escaped. Hence arise sharp conflicts between the two authorities, ending of course very variously, according to the weight, or courage, or energy, or skill of the contending parties. And thus another element of great uncertainty is imported into the lottery

And now the day had been fixed for the drawing up of the communal lists. Little else was talked about in the country districts, and even in the cities the conscription became the leading topic of interest to all men, and certainly not less so to all women.

At Bella Luce the anxiety was certainly as keenly felt as in any homestead of all the district. There were two sons there, but the conscription could not take them both. The monster, ruthless as it was, had some bowels of compassion. It did not deprive parents of an only son! Carlo Vanni therefore was safe. His name would be returned in the communal list, but merely for the formal fulfilment of the law. His claim to exemption would be immediately allowed as a matter of course. But Beppo was of course liable. There was no chance of any objection being made to him. On the contrary, if his number should be at all within reach, it was very certain that the military officers would make every effort to lay their hands on the finest young fellow in all the country side.

But of course it was supposed in the world of Santa Lucia that Beppo Vanni would never have to serve. What! the son of old Paolo Vanni of Bella Luce! Why he could buy a dozen substitutes if needed! The old fellows who knew Paolo Vanni well, had some doubt upon this subject. Don Evandro, who knew him

thoroughly well, had no doubt at all about it. It might have been in his power to induce his old parishioner and friend to come down with a part of his hoarded *scudi* to buy his son's freedom. But Don Evandro had no intention to do anything of the sort. He had more than one reason for not wishing that any part of old Paolo Vanni's money should be spent in such a manner. In the first place it would be lending aid and support to the heretical and accursed Italian government. Don Evandro, as has been said, was a keen politician. He was a priest of that class, which, while entirely giving up the world, in so far as making themselves before all things churchmen, and having no interest, or ambition, or affection for anything save the Church, can be called giving up the world, yet remain, to all spiritual interests and purposes, intensely worldly. He was a sworn, true, and loyal churchman, ready to sacrifice much, to dare all things, and to deem all things permissible for the service of the Church. But of any other meaning of the term, save the visible and bodily constitution of the great corporation to which he belonged, he had about as much idea as a Red Indian.

The curate of Santa Lucia intended, therefore, that his parish should furnish as few men to Victor Emmanuel as might be. There were the hills near at hand. There was no contending influence on the spot to thwart his—no resident land-owners, no gentry. He had always possessed a very powerful influence over his—not all very poor, but very ignorant—parishioners; and now he meant to use it. It was necessary to be careful, however. The government was on the watch; it knew very well that the priests were almost to a man its enemies. Its suspicions were fully aroused, and the game to be played was not one altogether without danger.

But the curate had in the special case of Beppo Vanni a second reason for not choosing that he should either serve his time in the army or be bought off by his father. He had thoroughly espoused his old friend's

cause in the matter of Beppo's marriage. It was all in the line of his own duty and scheme of conduct to secure Sandro Bartoldi's money to the right side, instead of allowing it to go entirely to swell the means of the enemy, as would be the case if Lisa married Captain Brilli: not to mention that a match between Giulia and Beppo might, as the priest shrewdly guessed from all he had ever seen of Giulia, go far to endanger the subserviency of the Vanni money also to the good cause. It was therefore on all accounts necessary that Beppo should marry Lisa, and should not marry Giulia.

Those who live in a state of society in which priestly influence has comparatively little power over the secular affairs of private life, and which is not divided into two utterly opposed parties, by any such broad line of demarcation as that which separates Italian society into irreconcilably hostile camps, can hardly appreciate at its real importance the effects of such a system of tactics as that above indicated, carried out by so powerfully an organised body as the Italian clergy, consistently, perseveringly, and unflinchingly.

Now, if Beppo went to serve his time, he would come back with an additional prestige in Giulia's eyes, utterly emancipated from priestly control, and very probably in a great degree emancipated from parental control also. His return might be looked for at a fixed and known time, and there was everything to encourage Giulia to wait for him.

If, on the other hand, his father were induced to conquer his avarice so far as to pay the sum necessary to procure a substitute, he would remain in the country free to continue his pursuit of Giulia, and it would be very difficult to keep them apart.

But if, on the contrary, old Paolo were counselled to refuse to pay for a substitute,—counsel which he would be only too ready to follow,—and if Beppo should get a bad number, and could be persuaded to go off to the hills, Victor Emmanuel would lose a first-rate soldier; a contribution to the general lawlessness, discontent, and

ungovernableness of the country would be achieved, and Beppo would be effectually separated from Giulia; his return uncertain; his entire future precarious and full of difficulty; and possibly—who could tell?—old Paolo's succession secured to the much promising and well-disposed Carlo.

And what were the views of honest Beppo himself respecting this dreaded conscription? Unfortunately they were such as to render him but too easy a victim to the priest's designs, should he have the misfortune to be drawn to serve. Beppo was a thorough *contadino*, with all the feelings, all the prejudices, and all the ignorance of his class. The thought of being carried away from his native hills to some unknown and strange country, was intolerable to him. He had but very hazy and vague notions as to the nature of a soldier's life and duties. It was something, he knew, which men maimed and mutilated themselves to avoid—which men had before now killed themselves to avoid. For such stories of the desperation of the populations subjected to the remorseless conscription of Austria had reached those hills. He knew, or supposed he knew, that it involved monk-like self-abnegation, and entire subjection to the will of another in all things. None had ever, in the experience of these Romagnole rustics, left their country in compliance with the horrible conscription, and returned to their homes. None could have done so, for the conscription was now applied to that country for the first time. But in the absence of any such experience, all possibility of return was disbelieved. To be taken by the conscription was to bid a long adieu to all that made life precious, and to go forth into some unknown but terribly imagined state of misery and torment, never more to see the beloved hills, and yet more beloved faces of Romagna.

And even if he were to believe in the possibility of a return at some distant period, how could Beppo bear to tear himself away from Giulia, as matters stood with him? If she loved him, if she would only admit that he

was dear to her, and he could think of her, while he was undergoing his terrible fate in some distant land, as safe at home, thinking of him, waiting for his return, and unexposed to the pursuit of others, the misery might be more tolerable. But, as it was, to leave her unwon, to leave her a mark for the admiration and pursuit and wooing of all the young men in Fano, and he far away the while, not knowing anything, but dreading all things respecting what was going on at home—this was absolutely intolerable to him. He could not face it.

So there was a lottery chance between poor Beppo and frantic desperation. If the chance were to go against him, the priest's suggestions would find him but too well prepared to listen to them.

As to the hope that his father would, if the bad chance hit him, sacrifice such a sum as would liberate him from it, he had little or no hope of that. He knew his father too well. And a Romagnole peasant has too great a veneration for money, and too vivid a sense of the difficulty of obtaining it, and of the amount of toil, patience, self-denial, and time which hoarded money represents, to blame his father in his heart for his avarice as severely as another might have done. In truth, Beppo could have given the money to save himself, or to save one he loved ; but he considered that in so doing he should have been reprehensible rather than otherwise, on the score of profusion and reckless extravagance. No ! He had no expectation that his father would sacrifice money to buy him off his fate.

Little was known yet among the rural communes on the subject that was engrossing all their thoughts, except that the orders for making out the lists of those liable to serve had come, and that the lists were about to be made forthwith. But this first step in the business involved no action on the part of the victims, and no outward and visible sign of the action of others. It was completed silently in the bureaux of the authorities. It was like the first driving together of a herd of wild cattle, destined

to be afterwards forced through some narrow pass, where the hunters will pick them off as they rush by. There was a vague knowledge among the herd that they were being driven together, and that was all as yet.

All was ignorance and doubt, and terror made worse by these. A thousand different reports were spread about the country. Some said it was only a precautionary preparation, in case there should be war with Austria, and might therefore never come to anything. Some said that the drawing was fixed for the following year; some that it all depended on the king's pleasure; some, that it was all a chance; some few, that it was a dreadful certainty, and that the drawing was to be proceeded with directly.

Tormented by all this doubt and uncertainty, Beppo determined to make it partly the real motive, and partly the excuse for a journey to Fano. He fancied that his father had been less willing than used to be the case, to allow him to go to the city. He used to go frequently on market days; but lately his father for two or three weeks past made excuses for keeping him at home; and upon one occasion during that time, when the business of the farm had required that somebody should go to Fano, the old man had chosen to go himself. Beppo understood very well that the purpose of all this was to keep him from seeing Giulia—very likely to make her think that he did not care to see her. But now his father could hardly object to his going to the city in a matter of such vital importance to himself. Poor Beppo was in truth very anxious to obtain some certainty upon the subject; but he was yet more anxious, if possible, to see Giulia, and ascertain how she was going on—whether she had already gathered a circle of admirers about her; whether she had made any acquaintances of any kind; whether she was turning into a fine town lady.

So, one evening as they were returning from the field, he broached the subject to his father, saying that he

ought to make himself acquainted with the truth about the conscription.

Old Paolo admitted that, and said that he would consider what day he could best be spared from the farm; but his real object was to consult his spiritual adviser upon the point.

So, instead of lounging in the "loggia"—as he smoked his cigar, after supper, before going to bed—he strolled up to Santa Lucia, and saw the priest.

"Beppo has been telling me, your reverence, that he wants to go to Fano, to learn about the conscription. I doubt me, he wants something else more."

"No doubt, no doubt. I wonder you have been able to keep him quiet so long. Yes, let him go to Fano. It is right that he should learn all the particulars of the new law, since they touch him so nearly."

"He talks of going on Saturday"

Saturday was the Fano market-day, on which large numbers of the countrymen of the neighbouring districts (more of those from the surrounding plains, however, than of the hill people) were wont to assemble in the great piazza of the city.

"I am going in myself, on Saturday," replied the priest. "Suppose—or—no," he added, after a little meditation; "tell him there is something to be done,—that you cannot well spare him on Saturday; but that he may go on the following day. I may just as well see Signor Sandro myself, and perhaps *la Giulia*, too, before he goes in."

Old farmer Vanni, who, in fact, scarcely ventured on an action in any direction, without the advice and approbation of his friend Don Evandro, was, as is generally the case with hen-pecked husbands and priest-ridden laymen, specially unwilling to be thought to be guided by the *curato's* advice. So he said nothing that night in reply to his son's proposal; but while they were at their work the next morning, which was the Friday, he told him that he was loath that the hoeing of the bean-crop should be left off till it was finished; rain

might come — most likely would come — and then, where should they be? If he would stay to-morrow, and get the job finished, he should go to Fano on Sunday.

So it was settled that Beppo was to go into the city on the Sunday.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CHURCH OF THE OBSERVANTINES.

ON the Sunday morning, accordingly, Beppo started on his way to Fano. The priest had made his intended visit to the city on the Saturday, and had come home at night. But none of the Bella Luce family had seen him since his return. Beppo's heart beat fast as he found himself nearing the city; and in his nervous impatience, he could not forbear from pushing on his horse to a speed that brought him to the end of his journey a good half-hour earlier than he had calculated on arriving. In the deadest and sleepest of Italian cities there always is a little more stir and life on a Sunday than on other days. And this extra movement is not wholly ecclesiastical in its character. Sunday is the great day for recreation and amusement of all kinds, not despite the efforts of the clergy to make it otherwise, but with their approval and sanction. But there are various sorts of secular business, not partaking in any degree of the nature of diversion, which are apt to fall into the course of the Sunday's occupations. It is naturally the day on which the countrymen can most

easily come into town. Such shops as they may be likely to need are apt to be open ; and such business as may involve interviews between them and the denizens of the city are wont to be transacted.

Beppo, having put up his horse at the *osteria* used by the *contadini* from his part of the country, hurried to the house of Signor Sandro. From him he could learn all he wanted to know about the conscription, and from Lisa he doubted not that he should be able to find out the whereabouts of the house in which his treasure was lodged ;—a circumstance of which he had as yet been able to ascertain nothing ;—for, of course, neither his father nor Don Evandro were likely to afford him any information upon this subject. Indeed, Signor Paolo did not himself know where the house of Giulia's mistress was situated.

It was about eleven o'clock when Beppo reached the attorney's house. The little man was in his office ; and Beppo was told that he must wait in a passage, where three or four other countrymen, in their best Sunday attire, were already waiting, seated on a long bench against the wall, till their turn should come to be admitted to the attorney's presence.

Had they been townsmen, they would all, however much previously strangers to each other, have been in full conversation together. But being *contadini* they sate in silence, with care-worn anxious faces, but with meek-eyed patience, till the great authority sitting in that awful sanctum on the other side of the partition-wall should be ready to receive them, and give them the fatal answers of the oracle. But Beppo, in his anxiety, had raised his voice in speaking with the servant girl, who had opened the door to him ; and the attorney, having overheard and recognised it, came hurrying out of his den with his pen in his hand.

"What, Signor Beppo ! Is it you ? What good chance is it brings *you* to Fano ? Delighted to see you, as we always are."

"There were two or three things, Signor Sandro,"

began Beppo, slowly and timidly ; but the brisk little man cut him short.

"Look here, Signor Beppo," he said, taking him by the button, and drawing him a little down the passage away from the men who were sitting there, and dropping his voice to a whisper ; "you see how it is—all these people waiting to see me ! Never was so busy ! All through this troublesome conscription. Have not a minute to spare. But, look here ; come back at one, and eat a bit of dinner with us. Poor Lisa will be *so* delighted to see you ; and I know your visit is more to her than to me. Ah, you young fellows. Well, I was young myself once. And then we shall have leisure for a little talk. *A rivederla*. At one, mind ! And Beppo," added the little man, standing on tiptoe to whisper in his ear, "Lisa is gone to mass at the Church of the Servites. If you should happen to fall in with her there, don't tell her that I told you so."

And so saying he opened the door for his visitor, and hurried back to the discussion of exemptions and substitutes with his clients.

Beppo, with thus nearly two hours on his hands, did not, despite his being utterly at a loss how to get rid of them, feel much inclined to go to the Servite church. He wanted to have some conversation with Lisa, too. But the very evident hints of Signor Sandro, to the effect that it was expected of him that he should make love to her, had the effect of making him feel shy. It takes so much to make an Italian of the cities feel shy and so little to produce that effect on one of the *contadino* class.

Beppo felt more inclined to spend his two hours in wandering through the city, to try if he could divine from the outward appearance of the houses which of them held his Giulia. It seemed to his imagination an absurd and incredible thing that she should be behind any one of those walls or windows, and that no recognisable difference should exist in that wall or window—that there should be no *shekinah*, no outward and visible glory be-

tokening the presence of such an inmate. He went mooning through the streets at hazard, gazing at the houses and windows wistfully, but without being able to obtain the slightest satisfaction from the investigation.

At length, having wandered into a part of the city far away from the attorney's house, he found himself in a quiet, utterly deserted street, partly made up of dead walls. But on the opposite side to that on which he was standing, and a little in advance of him, there was a small church, and beyond that a very large and handsome palace. There was not a soul besides himself in the street; but as he stood gazing down it, and doubting whether he should go any farther in that direction, which seemed to lead to the outskirts of the town among a wilderness of garden walls and open spaces, he saw a party of people coming out of the little church, and beginning very slowly to descend the steps that led to the street.

They moved very slowly; for the lady who came first was enormously fat; and though she had the arm of a young man to assist her—an officer of Bersaglieri, Beppo saw by his uniform, which from a regiment of that branch of the service having been for some months stationed at Fano, was known to him—she came down the steps with some difficulty. But in the next moment all the blood in his body seemed to make a sudden rush to his heart, and there remain in a great frozen lump. Behind that enormous fat woman came—*la Giulia!* And—heavens and earth!—she had another of the same corps in attendance on her; not an officer, but a corporal! Yes, there was his stripe—a corporal of Bersaglieri. Was it possible? Could he believe his eyes? He must be mistaken! The beautiful creature he was looking at, as if she had been a Medusa, seemed more beautiful to his eyes than ever. Was it Giulia? She was no longer dressed altogether as a *contadina*; and though still wearing only a kerchief on her head, it was far more coquettishly arranged than it used ever to be at Bella

Luce; and there were sundry other little town-bred changes in her costume that seemed—to the eyes which had the Bella Luce Giulia so indefaceably photographed on their retina—to make the present avatar very different from the old one, though the worshipper could not deny that it was one of enhanced glory. But was it Giulia, or was he dreaming?

How exquisitely lovely, but yet how detestable—how horrible was the vision! Who and what was that horrid corporal—brisk, smart, tight little man—who wore his round plumed hat in the most jaunty manner? Corporals of Bersaglieri are all brisk, smart, tight little men, who wear their hats in a jaunty manner. And he danced and skipped by Giulia's side, chattering and gesticulating and looking up into her face; and she was laughing, and looking as happy as a queen. She had never laughed when *he* had looked into her face. And now that disgusting corporal! evidently a very witty and agreeable corporal;—she was listening to all he said, and evidently amused by it. She could have bounded down the church steps like one of the Bella Luce goats, and so could the corporal of Bersaglieri too, for that matter. But slow as the fat woman in front of them was, they seemed to be in no hurry, but stopped, and laughed, and sauntered on again, clearly well pleased to linger over the matter as might be.

Beppo, at the first moment of catching sight of her, had thrown himself precipitately behind a pillar by the side of a palace door on the side of the street on which he was standing; and had watched all the above-dreadful spectacle, cautiously looking out from behind it. But, as he bitterly said to himself, there was no danger of her seeing him: she was far too much occupied by listening to that odious corporal.

But, once again, could it be Giulia? Or was it possible that his eyes, even at the distance at which he was, could see Giulia and doubt whether it were really she or not?

While he was still gazing out from behind his shelter,

with fixed stony eyes and open mouth, the fat lady achieved the descent of the steps, and waddling along the pavement with the assistance of the captain's arm, turned in at the grand door of the palace next the church. Giulia—if it was Giulia—and the corporal followed her ; and Beppo was left staring after them, among the people, who had by that time begun to leave the church.

Surely it could not be that Giulia lived in such a grand house as that ! Signor Sandro had spoken of the lady, in whose service she was to live, as by no means a rich person ;—a widow lady, living quite in a modest manner. It could not be that that was her residence : he must have been mistaken. Now the glorious yet hateful vision was no longer before his eyes, he began to persuade himself that it must have been a mistake—a hallucination. Yet, again his head swam round !—he was determined to know the worst. He had already made a step or two across the street with the intention of entering the alarmingly magnificent porch, in which the party he had seen had vanished (captain, corporal, and all), when he was arrested by the thought of how he was to accomplish his purpose. He must ring at the great door ; when the servant came what was he to say ? Ask if one Giulia Vanni lived there ? And if the reply were in the affirmative, what then ? His *contadino* timidity and shyness dared not thus beard the city magnificences. Besides, he should soon know all. There was another way. He would go at once to the Church of the Servites, and see if he could meet Lisa ; if not, he should probably find her at home. From her he should be able to learn the truth.

So he asked one of the people who were coming from the church, from which the fat lady and her attendants had issued, and obtained a direction to the Servite church. The high mass was just over there also, by the time he reached it ; and he had not watched at the door long before little Lisa, accompanied by her maid, came out. She looked so smart in her Sunday dress, that poor Beppo felt shy in accosting her there, in the street, amid all

the people thronging out of the church. But the emergency was too pressing to admit of hesitation. So he stepped up to her, and instantly disobeyed her father's injunction, by saying :

"Signorina, your father told me that I should most likely find you here. I came in from Bella Luce this morning."

"Oh, Signor Beppo ! I am so glad to see you. I have been thinking that you were never coming to Fano any more. And yet—one would have thought that you would have found more to do in the city than ever. What on earth has become of you ? You have not come a bit too soon, I can tell you."

"What do you mean, Signora Lisa ?" replied Beppo, while a cold sweat came over him. "Is there—anything new ?"

"*Altro !* You should not have stayed away so long. Out of sight out of mind, you know."

"May I walk home with you, Signorina ? Your father has kindly asked me to dine there. But I came here because I was so anxious ; and—I knew that you would tell me—tell me—all !" faltered Beppo, whose words seemed to stick in his throat as he uttered them.

"But first tell me why you have been so long without coming to Fano ? I thought, of course, that you would have come in to see Giulia at least every market day. And I am sure she expected it, too, though she has never said a word. And in all this time you have never been near her once."

"Because I could not ! They would not let me leave the farm. Oh, Signora Lisa ! can you doubt that I was anxious to come ? But, now that I have come, what am I the better ? What can I do ? But do you know Lisa," he continued, dropping his voice to a shuddering whisper, "I think I have seen her—I think I saw her in the street this morning."

"Think you saw Giulia ! Why, Signor Beppo, what do you mean ?" said Lisa, looking up at him in amazement. "Don't you know whether you saw her or not ? Did you not speak to her if you saw her ?"

"No! I did not speak to her. I—I—I did not feel certain—she seemed so changed. But tell me first of all where she lives? Is it a very large house?"

"Yes. The Palazzo Bollandini; one of the largest palaces in Fano!"

"Very grand?"

"Yes; a very fine house."

"And is it next door to a church?" asked Beppo, in increasing agony while his great stalwart legs seemed to tremble under him.

"Yes, it *is* next door to the Church of the Observantines. Why, what of it?"

"And is the lady she is living with a very stout woman?" asked he, still hoping against hope, and longing to hear that Giulia's mistress was by no means particularly stout.

But Lisa ruthlessly destroyed the last gleam of hope.

"Yes, *la* Signora Dossi *is* a *very* stout woman," she said.

"Then it is all over with me!" said Beppo, in a voice of the deepest despair; "there can never be anything again between me and Giulia!"

"What do you mean, Signor Beppo? All over between you and Giulia, because Signora Dossi is very fat! What can you mean? I do not understand you this morning! If it was after dining with papa, instead of before——"

(The Romagnoles are not marked to the same degree by the exemplary sobriety which distinguishes the Tuscans.)

"I am sober enough, *pur troppo!*" returned Beppo, with intense sadness in his voice. "Then I *did* see Giulia just now. She was coming out of a church with a monstrously fat woman, and they went into an enormous palace next door."

"Well! and why did you not speak to her?"

"Lisa," said Beppo, in a low voice of the deepest tragedy. "Lisa, there was a corporal with her!"

"Ah, the corporal," said Lisa, in a voice which in-

licated that the corporal was no new phenomenon to her.

"Lisa ! "

"And who was with the fat lady ? " asked Lisa, rather hurriedly.

"The fat lady had got hold of the arm of a captain of Bersaglieri."

"Dear me ! I wonder what o'clock it is," said Lisa. "I wonder whether there could be time. We don't dine till one, and cook is always a quarter of an hour behind-hand."

"Time for what, Signorina Lisa ? It is striking the quarter to one, now, by the clock in the piazza. Oh, Lisa ! I am very miserable !" said poor Beppo, in a tone which seemed to convey a little reproach for the manner in which she had received his communication of the misfortune of the corporal.

"Time to go and see Giulia before dinner. I was thinking we could go together and pay a visit to Signora Dossi ; but I'm afraid we have not time," she added with a voice of much disappointment.

"Me ! I could not think of doing such a thing ! " said Beppo, with terror and horror in his voice.

"What ! not go and see Giulia ? "

"With that corporal there," shuddered Beppo.

"Oh ! the corporal is only with Captain Brillì. That was Captain Brillì that you saw with *la* Signora Dossi," said Lisa, blushing a little, and laughing a little more.

"Oh—h—h ! Ah—h—h ! " rejoined Beppo, with a varying intonation that marked the progressive development of enlightenment in his mind ; "that is why you go there. But Singora Lisa, I can't go there to see that corporal and Giulia together. It would make me mad ! "

"But that is just the reason you should go there, Signor Beppo," reasoned little Lisa. "Perhaps if you had not stayed away from Fano so long, the corporal would not have had so good a chance. But take my word for

it, Giulia don't care a fig for him. He *does* go on with her, to be sure. And he is a very amusing man, tho corporal. And what is a poor girl to do?—and such a girl as Giulia is, too! How can you think that she is to live in a town like Fano,—especially when the place is full of officers and soldiers,—and not be admired and run after?”

Poor Beppo groaned deeply. “How long has she known the man?” he asked, despondingly.

“Oh, Captain Brillì goes very often to *la Dossi*. I hardly ever can see him anywhere else to speak to him. And Corporal Tenda is very much with him. I believe the corporal * at home in Piedmont is rather above his position in the army. Ho is a very respectable sort of man, I fancy. And so he made acquaintance with Giulia, you see. And how could she help it? But I don't believe she cares a bit about him,—not to say, really care,” pleaded Lisa.

But Beppo had seen the corporal's manner and his look, as he seemed, to Beppo's imagination, to surround her on all sides at once with his accursed agile assiduity; he had seen the attention Giulia was according to him, and had observed the merry laughing intelligence in her eye. He had contrasted with this his own physical and mental attitude when near her, and her manner towards him; and the iron had entered into his soul.

* It may be observed, also, that the social distance between an officer and a non-commissioned officer is very much less in the Italian army than in our own.

CHAPTER V.

CORPORAL TENDA.

It was with a very bad appetite that Beppo sat down to the attorney's table. Nor was the information that Signor Sandro had to communicate to him respecting the other great object of his visit to the city at all more consoling to him than that which had already made life seem not worth having to him since that morning. If the conscription had simply involved getting knocked on the head and put out of his pain at once, he felt as if he could have been quite contented to draw Number One!

The news which the attorney had to give him, indeed, confirmed all the worst fears of the poor fellows whom he left at Santa Lucia, anxiously awaiting the tidings that he would bring back from the city. The conscription was not merely threatened; it was certain. It was not for next year, but for this. The day for the drawing had not been appointed for Fano yet; but it would be very shortly known, and would certainly be not longer than a fortnight after the completion of the communal lists. His brother Carlo was exempt; but he, Beppo, was as surely liable as any man in the district;—"and it is not

very easily that they will let a fellow of your inches out of their clutches, my friend, if you once get into them," added the attorney.

"One can but take one's chance!" said Beppo, striving to put the best face on the matter that he could. "After all, the chance is in one's favour."

"Well, yes, as far as equal chances go, it's in your favour, of course; but the devil of it is that these *signori uffiziali* are bent upon getting the likeliest men. And if the draft were for a hundred, say, and you drew number two hundred, I should be sorry to insure you!"

"Why, how can that be, Signor Sandro? If a man is not fairly drawn he cannot be taken, I suppose?"

"Aha! fairly drawn. That's all very well. But it is not every man who is fit to serve. There is the medical examination. Ever so many are sure to be rejected. Then, as I tell you, they make all sorts of excuses to reject the smaller and weaker men, in order to get a chance of laying hold of a fellow like you. I suppose you can't make out that you have got anything the matter with you?" said the attorney, with a laugh.

"Oh, yes he has!" put in little Lisa; he has got a sore heart; and I am sure that is a very bad complaint. He has a very sore heart ever since I have been telling him all about *la Giulia*!"

"Oh, if that's his complaint, it's likely enough to get worse instead of getting better," said the attorney, affecting to give a low whistle, and turn his eyes up to the ceiling, as if that was a dull matter, about which the less was said the better.

"Why, what is there to be said against *la Giulia*?" said Beppo, almost fiercely.

"Against her? Oh, nothing! nothing at all! I never say anything against anybody. But it may be that all the world is not equally prudent or equally indulgent."

"Come, now, papa," said Lisa, "you know there is nothing to be said against poor Giulia, at all. Of course it cannot be expected that such a girl as Giulia should not be admired!"

"Well, it may be so, of course. And some men may have no objection to take up with a girl who has been flirted with by half the town, and talked of by the whole of it. Others may not like it. It's a matter of taste. If I was a young fellow in a respectable and good position, the head of my family—to be so one day, at least—and looked up to by all the country, I should not like to make a girl my wife who had gone through that sort of thing. Girls are easily spoilt;—and the handsomest perhaps the quickest."

"Tell me the truth, now, as an old friend, Signor Sandro!" said Beppo, piteously, while the big drops of perspiration gathered on his brow; "do you mean that *la Giulia* has got herself talked about in a way—that—that a good girl should not?"

"Well, my dear friend, it is a difficult question to answer! It is hard to say what a good girl may do, and what she may not. I don't wish to be severe. I dare say *la Giulia* is a very good girl, as girls in her position are,—a very good girl. But she has been very much—admired, we will say. She has been a good deal spoken of. Men *will* speak of such things in a town like this. No doubt *la Giulia* has had her head turned a little! *Che vuole?* No doubt it would have been better if she had kept this Corporal Tenda—I think they call him—more at a distance. Still there is no great harm in it all! Only that if I, as a man who has some knowledge of the world, and as an old friend of the family, were asked for my advice in the matter of choosing a wife for your father's son,—why, I should not pitch upon *Giulia Vanni*. Girls of her sort make the most charming sweethearts in the world. But a good wife is another sort of article!"

Beppo knew perfectly well that the attorney had a motive for saying all this. He knew perfectly well what that motive was. Nevertheless it gave him exquisite pain to hear it. Did not what had fallen from *Lisa*, who had no such motive, but quite the contrary, confirm it? Worse than all, did not the evidence of his own eyes

vouch for the truth of a good deal of it. He dreaded, yet longed for, an interview with her. If only he could have heard her disculpate herself! He would believe every word she said. That he was quite determined on. Did Giulia ever lie? He would believe her in preference to all the calumnious tittle-tattle tongues in the city. If only she would say that—that—that—she loved him, Beppo Vauni, in short; that was, in point of fact, the exculpation that he thirsted to hear from her own lips!

Signor Sandro, if he had effected nothing else by his insinuations, had effectually destroyed the convivial capabilities of his guest. Beppo sat moody and silent, and could not be induced to drink, when the cheese and fruit were placed upon the table. The attorney made one or two hospitably-meant attempts to induce him to do so, but finding it of no avail, he said:

"Well, Signor Beppo, if you will not drink any more wine, I shall take my *siesta*. If you like to do the same, make yourself at home. And if you like to take Lisa to the *passeggiata* afterwards, I have no doubt she will be well pleased. You will find me in my study when you come back; and if you will look in for a moment before you mount, I will give you a line to take to your good father from me. *A rivederla!*"

As soon as ever Lisa and Beppo were left alone together, Lisa said:

"Now, Beppo, you must not mind a word of all papa was saying. It is all stuff and nonsense. You know what he has got in his head,—more stuff and nonsense still. Don't you believe a word of it!"

"But when I saw that corporal with my own eyes, Lisa!"

"Saw the corporal! What of that? Do you think Giulia is going to shut herself up as if she was a nun, for you; and you never to come near her for weeks and weeks? But, I tell you she don't care a fig's end for the corporal! Just you see her, and it will all come right!"

"How am I to see her, Lisa?" asked Beppo, in a very piteous tone.

"How? Why come to *la Dossi's* house, now directly, with me, to be sure!"

"Oh, Lisa! and if that corporal is still there?"

"That is just what you must go for, Signor Beppo. You must go and see for yourself that there is nothing at all serious between Giulia and Corporal Tenda. And, besides that, you must go, to let Giulia know that you are thinking of her. You have stayed away too long. What do you suppose Giulia would feel if she heard that you had been to Fano, and gone away without so much as making any attempt to see her! I know what I should feel if Captain Brilli treated me in such a way. Why, she would be justified in taking up with the corporal or anybody else out of sheer despair, she would. Most likely," continued Lisa, improving upon the idea which had only that instant come into her head for the first time, "most likely it's merely *that* which has led her to encourage the corporal at all,—if she has encouraged him, which I, for one, don't believe. But you must not think that if you don't do your duty by poor Giulia, the corporal won't make the most of it to her. Of course he will. And small blame to him! If he should hear—as of course he will hear—that you have been to Fano, and never been near her, he will make a pretty story of it to her; and then—there's no saying what a girl may do in such a case as that!"

We know that little Lisa had her own reasons for being determined to pay a visit that afternoon, while her father was enjoying his *siesta*, to her friend Signora Dossi. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that her arguments were sound; unless, indeed, Beppo were minded to give up the matter altogether; and once or twice the vision of that corporal at Giulia's side, on the church-steps, and of her manner, as she listened to him, as it recurred to his mind, almost made him wish to do so. The words of Signor Sandro, too, had not been without their effect, even though he knew that the counsel given was interested. For the well-to-do *contadino* is very sensitive to the voice of his public in matters of the sort. It would *not*

be well for Vanni of Bella Lucc to take home a wife who had been the talk of all Fano ! That was true, let what would be the attorney's motive for saying it. It was true, and he was mad, and miserable, and infatuated. He could not give up Giulia, however much his reason might be convinced that it were better that he should do so. He *could* not do it. Give her up ! He knew at the bottom of his heart, all the time that he was irresolutely hesitating whether he should consent to go with Lisa or not, that he would rather give up his life than give her up. And then he thought over all the incidents—the things spoken and the things done—under the cypress-tree, in the path between Bella Lucc and Santa Lucia ; and his anger was forgotten, and his heart yearned towards her ; and he would forgive her everything—if only she would be forgiven !

“Come, Signor Beppo !—come along ! You can, at all events, come with me as far as the door of the Palazzo Bollandini. We can talk of your going in or not by the way. Any way, it's as well to be walking as sitting here. Come along !”

So, merely out of civility to *la* Lisa, and because he could not help himself, he put on his hat and accompanied her.

It had seemed to Beppo in the morning that the Palazzo Bollandini was a long way off from Signor Sandro Bartoldi's house—very much farther than it now appeared ! Perhaps he had not come the shortest way in the morning. Perhaps the difference was due to the different attitude of his own mind. He had made very small progress towards determining what he would do when he got there, when he found himself with Lisa before the huge portal of the palace ; and he recognised, with a shudder, the church front and the steps where that horrid vision of Giulia and the Bersaglieri corporal had blasted his eyes.

Lisa entered the great gateway, and tripped up the huge staircase without pausing a second to give Beppo time to think what he should do. She skipped up the

stairs to the *primo piano*, and he had nothing for it but to run up after her. She seized the little bit of scarcely visible twine—knowing right well exactly where to look for it—while he was lost in awe and wonderment at the grandeur of the place he had entered, and rang as vigorous a peal as the little bell-pull would execute.

“But, Signora Lisa,” remonstrated Beppo; “I think
——”

But they had not to wait for the opening of the door so long this time as when Giulia and Signor Sandro had stood before it, for they were lighter feet which went across the huge hall to admit them.

While Beppo’s hesitating remonstrances were yet on his lips, the door was opened by Giulia herself.

It was of course the most natural thing in the world that it should be so; but the possibility of it had never entered into Beppo’s head for an instant. Probably the truth was, that he hardly realised the fact that that huge and magnificent door was absolutely the private entrance to the dwelling in which Giulia resided, but rather had an idea that a whole nest of homes would be found within it, in the futhermost penetralia of some one of which she would be at length reached.

And when the tall door opened, there, framed in the marble door-case, stood before him the figure of his enchantress, more beautiful than ever, set off with a hundred little town coqueties,—transmuted, glorified, but still unmistakably the Giulia whose eyes had made the Bella Luce light deserve its name, and whose absence made all dark there. He was as much taken aback and rooted to the spot with speechless amazement as if he had suddenly met her at the antipodes.

He certainly had never seen her look so beautiful as she looked at that moment; and all—his own bitter agony, and the stinging insinuations of the attorney—would have been forgotten and forgiven on the spot, but for a withering sight that met his eyes as they looked beyond her into the space of the huge hall. There, immediately behind her, stood the odious, the intolerable

corporal. He had evidently either been alone with her in the hall, or stuck to her so inseparably that he had accompanied her across it to open the door.

Beppo's eyes glared with rage and indignation; and assuredly his whole appearance was very little like that of one meeting an old friend, to say nothing of an old love, with pleasure.

Giulia, too, was to a certain degree moved, and to a certain degree embarrassed by the presence of the corporal at her skirts. But when was ever a woman embarrassed under circumstances of the kind, let their difficulty be what it may, as a man is embarrassed.

Giulia's blood rushed to her face and neck, but she did not lose for an instant either her faculty of speech, or her presence of mind; nor did her voice shake, as she said:

"Ah, Signor Lisa! *Buon giorno! buona festa!* We have been expecting you!"

(Lisa stood nearest to the door, and Beppo's tall figure was seen over and behind her; therefore it was natural to address her first.)

"*Buon giorno*, Signor Beppo! Are they all well at Bella Luce? We did *not* expect to see you to-day."

Lisa had at once stepped into the hall; and was greeting the corporal in the style of an old acquaintance, leaving Giulia face to face with Beppo, who was still standing gaping and almost gasping, on the landing-place outside the doorway.

"Signor Caporale," said she, turning to the corporal, after she had paused half-a-minute with the door in her hand, waiting for Beppo to enter, "will you have the kindness to await my cousin Beppo Vanni's decision whether he will come in or not. I must go and take *la Signorina Lisa* to *la padrona*."

And so saying she turned away to cross the hall, leaving Beppo and the corporal face to face. Lisa tried to throw an encouraging and inviting glance to poor Beppo, over her shoulder; but was obliged to hurry off with Giulia across the hall.

Beppo had a very good mind to turn on his heel without saying a word, shake the dust off his feet as a testimony against the abominable house he was in, and turn his back on it and Giulia for ever ! Forgive her ! No, he never, never could forgive her. It was monstrous ! It was loathsome !

He had a very good mind to turn his back and walk away—but he did not do it. For it was beyond his power.

“ So you are Signor Beppo Vanni, are you ? Come in, comrade, come in ! the more the merrier ! ” said Corporal Tenda, after the two men had remained staring at each other for a minute without speaking ;—Beppo looking scared and savage, and the corporal perfectly self-possessed and perfectly good-humoured.

Corporal Tenda was a model corporal of Bersaglieri, small, light-made, wiry, active, with a shrewd, good-tempered bright, sunburnt face, a frank, bold blue eye, and a bush of short, crisp, curly brown hair ;—a dangerous man for a rival in the good graces of a high-mettled girl, though not comparable either in face or in person to the handsome, stalwart, classical-featured Romagnole. But if his limbs were nimbler than those of the Hereulean-proportioned Beppo, his wit was far more so. A ready wit is not generally the distinguishing characteristic of the Piedmontese ; and Corporal Tenda was a native of that province ; doubtless of a stock deriving its origin as well as its name from the little mountain village which gives its well-known appellation to the picturesque Alpine pass between Nice and Turin. The corporal was, as Lisa had said,—and as has been by no means an uncommon case since Italy has needed all her stoutest arms and hearts in the ranks of her defenders—of a social position in his own country somewhat higher than that which he held (only provisionally, the corporal trusted) in the army. He was a man of some little education, of far more than poor Beppo could boast ; and was, though a Piedmontese, a sharp, clever fellow. He was, moreover, a thoroughly good, honest-hearted little man ; and though

he had abundance of the military tendency to look down on the entire race of bumpkins, and quite a sufficiency of the provincial Piedmontese assumption of superiority to the inhabitants of the other provinces of Italy, yet any man who came into relationship of any kind with Corporal Tenda, and showed himself in that relationship to be a man of honour and character, was sure to be treated by him as he deserved.

"You know my name, then?" said Beppo, who had so far obeyed the corporal's invitation as to come just sufficiently far across the door-sill as to make it possible for the latter to close the door behind him. He had done so because he did not know what else to do. And now he stood moodily measuring his smart little enemy from head to foot, thinking how easy it would be to pitch him out of one of those great windows into the street, and how much he should like to do it. It no more came into his head to be personally afraid of the corporal, than he would have been of a little terrier who barked at his heels. But he was much afraid of his uniform. The *contadino* mind stands in great and habitual awe of the military. For all that, Beppo would have been very glad to pick a quarrel with him; though he had a vague idea that to strike or resist such an embodiment of the *forza pubblica* would *ipso facto* subject him to be shot kneeling on his own coffin. But he felt as if he should rather like to be kneeling on his coffin than not, especially if Giulia could be compelled to witness his fate, and to know that he had incurred it by fighting to defend her from all snares, corporals, and other emissaries of the evil one. But Corporal Tenda did not seem to intend to give him any opportunity of entering on such a desperate course of conduct.

"Know your name, Signor Vanni!" said he. "*Altro!* I should think so, *per Bacco!* Who does not know the name of Vanni? Your lordship shares it with the divinest girl in all Romagna—in all Italy, I should say!"

"My business here was to see my cousin Giulia," said Beppo, scowling more blackly than ever. "My father

is in some sort responsible for—for her safety—and—and the decency of her conduct.”

“Ha! You come armed with parental authority, eh?” and the corporal winked in the most provokingly intelligent manner and the most perfect good humour as he spoke. “Pray walk in, and permit the Signorina Giulia to crave your blessing. It will be, I doubt not, supremely satisfactory to her! Allow me to do the honours of this poor mansion!” continued the corporal, waving his hand, as he spoke, with the mock airs of a host, and bowing low to Beppo as he motioned him to precede him.

“My cousin is but a poor servant in this house,” growled Beppo, while his mind was distracted from what he was saying by a desire rapidly becoming uncontrollable to spring on the accursed corporal, and strangle him then and there. “If she is disengaged, I might speak a few words to her before I leave the city; if not, it does not matter,—not the least in the world. Perhaps I had better not disturb her!”

“*Come! vi pare!* Can you dream of it? A nice kind of guardian and protector you are for a young girl. Oh—é, Signora Giulia!” he cried out, raising his voice till it echoed again in the large empty hall; “here’s Signor Beppo yearning to give you his fatherly blessing; but he is in such a hurry just now to be off, that, if you do not come out for it directly, he will carry it off straight back to the hills with him. Oh—é, Signora Giulia!”

“Hush—h—h!” cried Giulia, running out from the inner rooms, and holding up her hand with a warning gesture; “are you mad, Signor Caporale, to make such a noise as that? Don’t you know that *la padrona* is taking her *siesta*?”

La padrona was taking her *siesta*! And Giulia had been alone, then, with this animal of a profligate corporal! thought Beppo to himself. It was too bad—too barefaced! Thank God! he had come into the city, and made himself acquainted with the truth. Thank God! he had escaped wrecking his heart on a worthless girl. Escaped? Poor Beppo groaned

inwardly as the word returned to his mind in the guise of a question.

They had not been absolutely *tête-à-tête*, however, he thought. For he supposed that Captain Brillì must be in the house somewhere. Lisa had vanished into the inner penetralia, and no doubt knew of the captain's whereabouts.

The fact was, that the attorney's daughter and her lover were at that instant discussing all the chapter of their hopes and fears in a delicious *tête-à-tête* in *la Dossi's* vacant sitting-room.

"How could I think about *siestas* or anything else, when your estimable guardian here was talking of leaving the house without seeing you, gentilissima Signora Giulia?" said the corporal, adding action with both hands, as he stood a few yards from Beppo on the paved floor of the vast hall, and affecting to speak in a voice of urgent remonstrance.

"My guardiau!" said Giulia, tossing her head.

"I made no such claim," said Beppo sulkily; "I should be very sorry to assume such an office."

"Come to see that the young lady conducted herself decently, on behalf of her family, if I understand your worship aright," said the corporal, skipping into a new rhetorical attitude as he spoke.

"I said," replied Beppo, stammering and turning very red, "that—my father—and mother—would—would be glad to hear that my cousin Giulia was—was—was going on well. I leave it to her to judge how far they will be satisfied with my report."

Giulia's eyes flashed at this, and the lightning was instantaneously followed by the thunderbolt.

"There is nobody at Bella Luce," she said, "to whom my conduct is of the slightest importance. There is one way only in which I could grieve the heart of Signor Paolo Vanni, and in that way he may rest very sure I shall *never* afflict him!"

Corporal Tenda saw with undisguised admiration, and Beppo with an agony made up of a sense of self-blame

conflicting with burning indignation and ardent love for his cousin, how much scorn could look beautiful in Giulia's eyes as she spoke those last words—words which Beppo but too well understood.

"*Diavolo!* If family matters of delicacy have to be discussed—if the lady has confidences to make to her father confessor, allow me to suggest the privacy of a confessional!" said the corporal, waving his hand towards the old sedan-chair in a distant corner of the hall. "It would be impossible to desire better accommodation for the purpose."

"Don't be a fool, Signor Caporale," said Giulia, as gravely as she could, but darting a laughing glance out of the corner of her eye at the corporal, as she spoke, which Beppo caught *in transitu*, and which formed perhaps the heaviest item in all the long bill against her scored up in his much-lacerated heart. "If you choose to walk in, Signor Beppo," she continued, in a milder tone, though still very haughty—for she had been grievously offended by that ill-judged slip of the tongue which poor Beppo had been guilty of in the excess of his embarrassment and ill-humour in speaking to the corporal and which the latter had so remorselessly turned to the utmost account—"if you choose to walk in, I shall be happy to present you to *la Signora Dossi* as soon as she wakes."

She spoke coldly and haughtily; but there was a feeling at her heart, due perhaps in some degree to the intensity of the misery which was legible in Beppo's handsome face, which prompted her to accompany her words with a look—not precisely of tenderness, and still less of pleading; but certainly of reconciliation and invitation. It was but momentary, however, and Beppo was either too slow to see it or too angry to heed it.

"I do not see that I could be of any use in coming in," said he, gloomily; "I should only interfere with the pleasant party assembled here. Besides, I must be starting for *Bella Luce*, and I can easily understand that you are in no hurry for *la Signora Dossi* to wake."

The last words were accompanied by a look of indignant and bitter reproach at Giulia.

"As you please, Signor Beppo," said she, at once turning on her heel, and going towards the door of the inner rooms; "Signor Caporale," she added, as she crossed the hall, "will you kindly open the door for my cousin? I wish you a pleasant ride home, Signor Beppo."

And with those words she vanished; and instantly an immense and poignant repentance of his refusal of her invitation fell upon Beppo. He felt as if he would have given worlds to recall it, if only for the gratification of his burning curiosity to know what would pass between her and the corporal during the remainder of *la Dossi's siesta*,—if only to protect her, ungrateful as she was, against that base and unprincipled wretch. Protect her! How could he protect her? He away at Bella Luce, and she with evidently all sorts of opportunities of meeting him as often as she pleased. And was he not already on terms of intimacy with her such as Beppo had never been able to attain, and that in a few weeks? and he had worshipped her, and lived under the same roof with her for years.

He turned slowly towards the door, with a hell of contending passions seething in his heart,—rage, bitter self-contempt, indignation, hatred, horrible jealousy, and desperate and unquenchable love.

Yes, love, after all, through all, and above all. He told his heart that he despised her, and cast her off, and hated her; and his heart knew that he lied, and loved her at the very moment as desperately as ever.

"Well, don't look so black about it, friend Beppo," said the corporal as he opened the door for him. "It seems that the young lady does not value the paternal blessing so much as I had supposed. Try her another way, next time."

"I want no next time," said Beppo. "It is not likely that I shall trouble your fun here another time."

"Well, we must not try to break our hearts. I won't

answer for mine, for it's a very tender one," said the corporal, placing his hand on the organ in question, and bowing low as Beppo passed the door. "I daresay we shall meet again, though, for all that," he added, looking with a soldier's eye after Beppo as he went slowly down the great staircase; "meantime, *buon viaggio, à rivederlo*."

And Corporal Tenda shut the door after him with undiminished good humour.

It is so easy for a man to keep his good temper under such circumstances.

Beppo walked away through the streets, now filling with people in their holiday trim, for it was just the hour of the *passeggiata*, feeling as if he had been stunned and was reeling. He never thought of returning to Signor Sandro's house for the letter the attorney had asked him to carry to his father; but found his way somehow or other unconsciously to the *osteria* at which he had left his horse, and ordered it to be brought out to him with a manner and voice that made the lame ostler, whose lameness had recently become so valuable a possession, say to a bystander, as he rode off: "There's another that's been balked in his hopes of getting a substitute. Wait awhile, and you'll see plenty more faces like that in Fano."

Beppo let his nag choose his own pace, and find his own way back to Bella Lucc. The old horse had no doubt on either point. He quietly sauntered along the well-known road, and never disturbed his master's deep reverie till he came to a full stop at his own stable-door.

The lights seemed to be all out in the farmhouse; for it was much beyond the usual bed-time of the inmates. Beppo, still moving as if in a dream, put his horse into the stable, took off his saddle, and then, after standing awhile gazing sadly into the distant moonlight far down the valley, heaved a deep, sobbing sigh, and turning away from the house towards the path leading to the village, walked straight to the great half-way cypress in the middle of the path.

There he flung himself on the path at his full length, and burst, great strong man as he was, into a passionate fit of tears.

When these had in some degree calmed the storm that was raging in his heart and brain, he set himself to think over every word, every accent, every gesture of the last meeting on that spot between him and Giulia. He would fain have found some motive of excuse, some possibility of explanation from the comparison of her words and conduct then, with what he had seen and heard that day. But each well-remembered look and phrase seemed to him only to make her present conduct appear the more odious, the more hideously inconsistent. False, false, false as hell! "No love, no love!" she had cried in the bitterness of her heart. "I *hate* them! I hate all men!"

Oh, what a wreath of bitter, bitter scorn sate on Beppo's usually inexpressive lips, as he recalled the words!

All thought of the conscription seemed to have gone far, far away into the background, as if it appertained to some distant matter; but still his mind would go over and over again the scene of that last night; and still the tender feelings which, despite his reason, would fill his eyes with tears at the thoughts of it, were alternated with the hot fit of burning rage and shame, and scathing jealousy, as he recalled those other memories of the morning.

And so passed the hours, till the morning Ave Maria from the tower of the neighbouring church of Santa Lucia recalled him to the necessity of reporting himself at home, and commencing with his father and brother the morning's task.

CHAPTER VI.

DON EVANDRO AT WORK.

VERY little passed that day between Beppo and his father and brother. Had they been townsmen instead of peasants, and, specially, had they been Tuscan townsmen, the tidings which Beppo brought home would have formed subject for endless talk at every spare minute during the day ;—(the tidings respecting the conscription, that is to say ; of course the other load at his heart had to lie there, and be borne in silence as best it might ;)—but Paolo Vanni and his sons were *contadini* and Romagnoles ; and but few words were said. Beppo briefly told them, as they went to their work, that the worst fears of the country were to be realised ; that the conscription was certainly to take place that year, and that a day for the drawing would be named shortly after the completion of the communal lists.

At dinner-time the same information was given in similarly concise words to the poor mother, who manifested but little more emotion outwardly than the male members of the family had done ; but she rose early next morning, and privately taking from the secret hoard of the pro-

duce of her yarn the price of two fair wax tapers of half-a-pound each, she stole off to the village, and, having bought what she needed, set them up alight before the altar of the Blessed Virgin of the Seven Sorrows, with an earnestly breathed prayer that the Holy Mother would deign, in consideration of that humble offering, to preserve a mother's son to her. True, all the other mothers in the parish would, in all probability, do the like. But it was not probable that any one of them would go to the expense of tapers of half-a-pound each. It was to be presumed, therefore, that the prayer so backed would be effectual. Nevertheless, poor Sunta, in her anxiety, turned back when she had gone a few steps from the church, and again kneeling before the figure with the seven daggers, stuck in artistic grouping through the satin of her stiffly brocaded, pyramidal-shaped robe, she promised two more tapers of equal size in case of a favourable result.

Poor mother! if earnestness could avail to make her prayer heard, it must have had its effect.

And so the day passed sombrely enough among the inhabitants of Bella Luce. The days had passed more sombrely there, even to old Paolo himself, since Giulia had left the farm. But that Black Monday, after Beppo's return from the city, was more so than ordinary.

In the evening, a little before supper-time, came Don Evandro. The priest was always a welcome guest at Bella Luce, for he knew how to make himself agreeable, with the tact so specially the gift of the Roman Catholic clergy, both to the farmer and to his wife. And the frequent presence of the priest at their table conferred a tone and style in the estimation of the Santa Lucia *beau monde* that nothing else could have compensated for. Many of the parish clergy in the poorer and remoter districts of Italy are glad enough to give the consideration bestowed by their presence in return for the hospitality afforded them. But this was not Don Evandro's object. He was too well off, though far from being a rich man,

to need a meal; and he had always some ulterior object in view. Power was what he wanted, and the means of leading his parish whithersoever he chose that it should go.

He was perfectly aware of Beppo's journey to Fano,—had in some degree prepared for it beforehand; and the object of his present visit to Bella Luce was to shape and confirm the impressions which he pretty shrewdly guessed the young man had brought back with him.

"I suppose, Signor Beppo, you brought home with you full information respecting this detestable and abominable conscription?"

"Yes, your reverence. It seems that it is all determined on," said Beppo, in a wearied and dispirited manner.

"And that is what the godless, usurping government and the infidel revolutionists call liberty! Liberty!—the forcible tearing of the flower of the population from their homes and families! Man-stealers! My heart bleeds for the unfortunates who are thus sent off to destruction, temporal and eternal. Ay, eternal! For what are they when they come back to their native soil,—if ever they do come back? Reprobates! They leave their paternal roofs well-disposed, God-fearing youths; and the few who ever return are lost reprobates, fearing neither God nor devil, filled with false notions and heresies, perverted in heart and in mind alike. Were I a father, I would rather see my son in his coffin than see him taken by the accursed conscription."

The father and mother and the two sons listened to this outburst with awe and terror. And the old farmer began to fear that he should certainly be expected to turn out his hoards, in order to buy his son off destruction, temporal and eternal.

"It is a very bad business," said the old man, scratching his head. "I don't see what is to be done in it—not I! Suppose our Beppo should be drawn, your reverence; what can a poor man like me do?"

"But there is good hope he may not be drawn; surely

there is good hope," said Signora Sunta, clasping her hands. "The Holy Virgin is very good. We have always done our best both at Nativity and Conception, besides a candle at the Annunciation—and always the best wax. Your reverence well knows we have never failed," said poor Sunta, appealingly; "surely we may hope that the Virgin will send us a good number."

"You have every reason, my dear friend, to expect a blessing on you and yours. I know nobody in whose case I should look forward to one with greater confidence," replied the priest; "but the worst of the misfortune is, that a good number cannot be trusted to as an escape."

"Signor Sandro told me something of that," said Beppo; "but I did not rightly understand him. He seemed to say, as far as I could make out, that after they had drawn the men by lot, if they did not like what the lot gave them, they picked out others."

"Well, it comes to nearly that," returned the priest; "for these sons of Belial are not honest even in the carrying out of their own infamous laws. If there is a man they fancy anywhere near on the list, they will make all kinds of lying excuses to get rid of the others, till they can put their hand on him. Such a lad as you, my poor Beppo, is just the sort they want to make a soldier of; and you may depend on it, if they have half a chance, they will leave no stone unturned to get hold of you."

"I don't think that seems fair," said Beppo; "a fair lot is in the hands of the Blessed Virgin and the saints; but when you come to picking and choosing, that is another matter."

The theory which thus limited the sphere of the influence of the spiritual powers was a curious one. But the Bella Luce theology was about contemporaneous with the Bella Luce system of vine-dressing, which, as we have seen, dated from before the Georgics.

The priest, however, only said in reply to Beppo's remonstrance:—

"Fair ! no : as if anything done by a robber government was likely to be fair ! It is all a mass of fraud, and violence, and tyranny, and iniquity, and godless impiety together."

It will be observed that the priest was very much more outspoken in his disaffection to the new government than he had been on the former occasion, when we had last the pleasure of meeting him. But Signor Sandro Bartoldi, the attorney, was present upon that occasion ; a man from the town, not one who could be counted on as a staunch adherent of the good cause—in short, not a safe man at all. *Now*, the parish priest was speaking before none but members of his own mountain congregation, and he spoke out accordingly. He was not aware, however, how far the minds of the younger generation of his audience had slipped away from the old moorings, and drawn (who can say how ? Who can say how minds do draw nutriment from the surrounding atmosphere of thought, as silently as trees do from the air ?) somehow or other the material for the formation of new judgments and views of the world around them. The slowness of the peasant's mind, the submissive reverence which prevents him from ever "giving his priest an answer," as the vulgar phrase goes, and the unexpansive silence in which his intellect works, combine to prevent the parish clergy from being fully aware of the degree to which the minds of the rising generation of their flocks have emancipated themselves from their leading-strings. Not that there was the slightest danger that any one of the Bella Luce family would have made any use of the disaffected words uttered by their priest in a manner to be injurious to him. Besides that, this unhappy conscription question had, to a certain extent, thrown their minds into unison of sentiment with his once more. Otherwise Beppo had begun to form a shrewd opinion of his own, that the Papal government was about as bad a one as it could be ; and that the new one, at all events, promised to be much better. But this conscription—it could not be denied that it was a bitter pill, and a stag-

gering difficulty for the adherents of the new order of things.

"They do say," remarked old Paolo, in reply to the priest's last words, "that money may buy a man off if he is drawn. I should not wonder: there's few things that money can't do. But how can I find the means of buying Beppo off?—a poor working man like me. How can I do it, your reverence?—not to be able to keep a decent house over my head and pay my way, church dues and offerings and alms and masses as well. How can it be done? It stands to reason it can't."

This was a desperate attempt on the part of the old farmer to know the worst, and ascertain whether he was expected to ransom his son at the cost of his hardly-saved and dearly-loved dollars. He knew very well that, if the priest said he must do so, he should have to do it. And he had thrown out a few topics for consideration to the *curato*—with the greatest tact and delicacy, as he flattered himself—which he thought might have the effect of influencing his decision upon the point in question.

The oracle spoke, and comforted him inexpressibly.

"There are few things, as you remark, Signor Vanni, which money judiciously employed may not do. Certainly it may bribe the wretches, who have usurped the territory and the power of the Holy Father, to disgorge the prey which they have seized in their infamous man-stealing. But I have very grave doubts of the lawfulness of thus expending money. I may say, indeed, that I am tolerably sure that it cannot be done without sin. And I have the means of knowing that such is the opinion of those in high places, and of the best authorities. To contribute money wilfully, not by compulsion, to the support of the excommunicated government is to give aid, countenance, and comfort to the enemies of our Holy Father, and persons under sentence of excommunication, which is very palpably damnable and mortal sin. But assuredly those who give their money for the purpose in question are guilty of doing this. My mind is quite clear upon the subject. I do not see how I should be able to give ab-

solution, perhaps not even *in articulo mortis*, to a person lying under the guilt of this sin ! ”

“ But,” Beppo ventured to say timidly,—“ but, your reverence, if you go to fight for the new government yourself, is it not as bad as paying another to do it for you ? Must it not be equally sinful to go yourself ? And yet one or other of the two you must do.”

“ Must you ? ” said the priest, drily.

“ Well, your reverence, it seems that if you are drawn you must,” said Beppo, simply.

“ My notion is,” said the priest, “ that there will be a pretty considerable number of young men—God-fearing, well-educated young men—drawn for the conscription in this province who will do neither the one nor the other : who will neither suffer themselves to be torn away from their country to fight against their Holy Father and lawful sovereign, nor yet give money to his enemies to hire somebody else to do so.” And as he spoke he rubbed his hands slowly together, and looked hard at Beppo.

The old father and mother looked from one to the other with watchful interest ; the former much relieved in his mind, and feeling more than ever that Don Evandro was a second Daniel come to judgment.

“ But it’s no use for a man to say he won’t go,” rejoined Beppo. “ Willy nilly, he must go. If he won’t go by his own will, he will be taken by force.”

“ Oh, no ! certainly ; it is of no use for a man to *say* he won’t go--of no use at all. It is not by *saying* that a man can do his duty to his God, and his Church, and his country. Duty mostly needs something more than *saying*,” returned the priest, with a marked emphasis, and still looking hard at Beppo.

“ I don’t see it, your reverence,” said Beppo, looking puzzled. “ What is a man to do, then ? ”

“ And yet it seems pretty clear, too,” rejoined the curate. “ You say, if a man won’t go, he will be taken by force ? ”

“ So I am told,” said Beppo.

"Who will take him?" asked the priest, Socratically.

"Why, the soldiers, I suppose!" said Beppo, with very widely opened eyes.

"And where will they take him from? Where would they take *you* from, for instance, if you did not go to them?" continued the priest, pushing on his catechism to its conclusion.

"If I were drawn, and did not go to give myself up at Fano, they would come here after me, and take me by force," said Beppo, beginning to think that the priest was really uninformed upon the subject.

"Very true; they would come *here*—here to Bella Luce! But suppose they did not find you here?"

"Then they would take me wherever they could find me. Why, bless your reverence's heart, they aren't put off in that way."

"They would take you wherever they could find you, no doubt. But suppose that they could not find you at all?"

"What! If I were to put an end to myself," said poor Beppo, not appearing to be very much startled by the suggestion; "but I thought, your reverence, that that was not lawful to do in any case?"

"Put an end to yourself! I am shocked at you, Beppo! Unlawful!—of course it is. How could you imagine I had such a thing in my thoughts?"

"Then I am sure I don't know, and it is not for such as I am to guess, what *is* in your reverence's thoughts!" said Beppo, utterly puzzled.

"Why, my good friend, Beppo, you are not so quick as I thought you. If you are drawn for the conscription,—say, you don't go. The soldiers come here to look for you;—don't find you. 'We want Beppo Vanni,' say they; 'where is he?' 'Really can't say,' says my friend, Signor Paolo. 'Sure he is not in the house?' says the officer. 'Quite sure,' says Signor Paolo. 'You can search it if you like.' They do search it, but they don't find Beppo Vanni. Then they come away to Santa Lucia to see the *curato*, and try what they can make out

of him. 'We are come to look for one Beppo Vanni, a parishioner of yours, your reverence. Can you tell us where we can find him?'—'He lives at Bella Luce, when he is at home,' says his reverence; 'is he not there now?'—'No, he is not there. But I suppose your reverence knows where to find him!' says the officer. 'If he is not there, he must be out in the hills. There are many wolves and wild boars, and such like, in our mountains, but they are mostly very hard to catch,' says his reverence. 'Beppo Vanni is very fond of hunting. If you keep on the wolf's track, I dare say you will find him; and I wish you a pleasant job of it,' says his reverence."

"*Now* do you see it, friend Beppo?" asked the priest, when he had concluded his little exposition, of which the latter part was delivered with considerable dramatic effect.

"What, take to the hills *per bene*?" said Beppo, with a grim smile;—"for good and all," as an Englishman might have said.

"Ay, for *good*, assuredly!" said the priest. "But it would only be for a short time, just till the secret was blown over, and the soldiers out of the country. That is what all the best men in the country will do. The excommunicated king will find that he will get very few men in Romagna, except the scum of the towns, to fight for him against the Holy Father."

"It looks like skulking, as if one had done something to be ashamed of, keeping out of the way in the hills in that fashion," said Beppo, thoughtfully.

"You will find, my friend, that all the shame will lie on the other side," returned the priest. "I tell you that all the best men in the country—those of them, at least, who have the misfortune to be drawn—will take to the hills."

"Your reverence spoke of the wolves and the wild boars," said Beppo, with a sigh; "every man's hand is against them, and they are hunted down."

"Yes," returned the priest, quickly; "they are hunted down because every man's hand *is* against them. But

there is just the difference. Those who take to the hills in this sacred cause will have every good man for their friend. We priests," continued Don Evandro, with a grim smile of conscious power, "are everywhere; and, do what they will, they will never root us out. Wherever there is a parish—what do I say?—wherever there is Catholic soil, *there* is a Catholic priest. And wherever there is a priest, those who are homeless for the good cause will have a friend. We shall have our eyes on those who are out in the hills on account of this business. They will not be let to want, neither for food nor for shelter; no, nor for communication with their friends at home," he added, looking hard at Beppo, with so meaning a glance that it was all but a wink.

"And your reverence thinks that it would not be for a very long time—that those who go out into the hills will be able to return to their homes after a while?" asked Beppo, musingly.

"Of course. It stands to reason. Specially those who live not in the towns, but in out-of-the-way places like this. Why, we are almost among the hills, as you may say, here. As soon as this conscription business is over, the troops will quit the country,—go to be shot down by the Austrian cannon, or to cut the throats of their brothers in Naples, or to be led to sacrilege against Rome, and be struck dead, perhaps, in the horrible act: what do I know? They will be marched away; and then the country will be quiet, till God sees fit in His mercy to restore the lawful and rightful government; and when *that* day comes, as come it surely will before long, those who have refused at any cost to bear arms against their Holy Father will have cause to bless themselves, and thank their good fortune."

"And your reverence thinks there would be means of holding communication with—with one's friends at home, or—or in the towns?"

"No doubt about that," said the priest, again looking, with peculiar intelligence, hard at Beppo. "We shall take care about that. There would be no lack of means

of communication. Any man in the hills for this cause might know, day by day, if he cared about it—which is hardly likely—what was the news in the towns.”

“That would be a great thing, certainly,” said Beppo, meditating, and seeming to speak more to himself than to the priest.

“What! I suppose your visit to Signor Sandro’s house yesterday has made you wish to hear from him again, eh?”

“Yes!—no! That is, your reverence, not from him particularly,” replied Beppo, far too simple to tell a lie, even when it was put into his mouth for him by the person to whom it was to be told.

“Ah! I see!” said the priest, pretending to misunderstand him; “not from *him*, perhaps. I am told that Lisa Bartoldi is becoming one of the most charming girls in Fano—immensely improved of late, and greatly sought after. No wonder, with her expectations. It is a pity her father should have let some of those scamps of officers come round her. But that will be all over as soon as they are out of the country—pests as they are! But Lisa is a prudent girl, and is very safe not to commit herself.” (The priest did not guess that Lisa had been perfectly confidential with Beppo on the subject of her loves with the captain of Bersaglieri.) “Would to Heaven,” he continued, “that as much could be said for that unfortunate Giulia! I have almost reproached myself for having advised that the proposal of Signor Sandro to send her to Fano should be accepted for her. But God knows I acted for the best, and to the best of my judgment. Who could have thought that a girl so brought up would have gone to the bad so shamefully, and that in so short a time?” And the priest lifted his hands and eyes to Heaven, or, at least, to the ceiling of the farmhouse kitchen, as he spoke. “But the fact is,” he added, dropping his eyes with a meek, resigned sigh, “that when a girl is thoroughly bad nothing can save her. A heartless, false girl is, and must be, lost, whether in town or country.”

The supper, of which Don Evandro had partaken with the family, had been finished long ago. It had consisted merely of the *minestra*, a bit of cheese afterwards, and a flask of the farmer's Bella Luce wine. But Signora Santa had been assailed by no false shame, and had made no efforts to increase her bill of fare, and no boasting excuses to the priest any more than to one of the family. For he was not a guest from the city, but a fellow-villager, who was one of themselves. The supper therefore had not taken long. And as soon as it was over, *la Santa* had without apology taken up the one *lucina*, or tall brass Roman lamp, which had stood on the supper-table, and had gone with it about her household affairs, leaving her husband and sons and their guest to smoke their cigars and have their talk by the light of the May moon which streamed in through the open kitchen door. Old Paolo had fallen asleep soon after the conversation had reached the point at which it had been authoritatively decided that it would be wicked of him to pay out money. Since that, the talk had been entirely between Beppo and the priest, and Carlo had been an attentive listener. It was fortunate for Beppo that they were sitting so nearly in the dark, for he felt that it would have been impossible otherwise for him to have concealed from the ever-watchful eye of the priest the agitation and misery which the last words of the latter were causing him. They did but confirm his own impressions of the day before. But then those impressions had been the result of indignation—of the things which he had seen with his eyes! His eyes no longer saw them! His indignation had begun to wane! The impressions had become less forcible and distinct. It was growing more possible for him to persuade himself that he exaggerated matters—that he himself had been to blame—that there might still be a possibility of hope for him, in short. But now the words of Don Evandro rudely threw down again all the fabric he was once more striving to raise, and cut off like a blighting March wind the new green shoots that his love, which would not be killed, was again putting forth.

The pain was very agonising to him, and it was a relief to him that it was too dark for the priest to see his features.

In truth, the darkness concealed little or nothing from the priest's knowledge, if it did from his eyes. He knew perfectly well the effect of what he was saying, as well as the surgeon knows the sensations of the patient under his knife.

But the operation was not over—Beppo had more to suffer yet.

“What mischief, then, has Giulia been getting into in the city, your reverence?” asked Carlo; “I am not surprised, for one, for I always thought her a bad one. I never knew her to stay for the litanies after vespers, not once last year; and I must know, for I never missed them all the winter!”

Don Evandro knew and understood all the low hypocrisy of this speech quite as perfectly as any man could; nevertheless he approved of it; thought it the desirable kind of tone for a young man, and considered that it showed Carlo to be the sort of man that was needed for a good subject and a good churchman. So a woman who receives a compliment which she knows to be insincere may yet be pleased with it, as indicating the desire on the part of the payer of it to please her.

“Ah! it is a bad business—a very bad business—I am afraid! Part of my object in going into the city on Saturday was to make inquiries and ascertain if there might be any hope of saving her. I fear me!—I fear that there is nothing to be done!”

The priest, not calculating on the chivalrous generosity of heart of the man he was speaking to, or rather at—(as how should he calculate on what he could not conceive?)—was overshooting his mark a little in the excess of his calumnious statements. For the idea of Giulia in danger and in trouble at once began to make love assume a mask of pity, and an evident desire to save and protect her began to override and overpower, for the moment, his own infinite misery.

"What has she been up to?" asked Carlo again.

"Oh, up to!" said the priest, hesitating as if unwilling to speak out. "What mischief do unprincipled girls get into when they get the opportunity? It is the old story. There is the town, too, full of soldiers, reprobate profligates, without religion or principle of any kind! It is destruction to the character of any decent girl to be known to have any communication with them, or be seen in their company, and this abandoned girl has formed an intimacy with one of the most notorious blackguards in the whole lot of them!"

Beppo groaned audibly, as he acknowledged to himself that his first impressions with regard to Corporal Tenda had been but too just.

"What! you don't mean," said Carlo, eagerly, "that she has—taken up with any one in particular, you know—so as to lose her character, you know?"

"Character! It would be well for her if that is all she has lost! Character! She will never be able to hold her head up in this country any more! The best thing that could happen to her would be to follow the blackguard for good and all, and let the disgrace she has brought upon her name be forgotten. But he is no doubt too knowing a rascal for that."

"But he may be made to answer for his conduct—to do what is right by her!" said Beppo, breathing hard, and clenching his fists.

The priest could not see the action; but he knew from Beppo's voice all that was passing in his mind. And he considered for a moment or two, during which he took a rapid survey of all the circumstances of the case with masterly comprehensiveness, whether it might be good policy to bring these men face to face with a result that might probably in one way or other make Carlo the heir to the Bella Luce homestead and savings. But he gave up the idea as involving too many possibilities of miscarriage. So he replied:—

"How make him answer for his conduct? His officers are as bad as he. There is no law to touch him. And

to resort to unchristian violence would bring destruction upon your own soul, in all probability without injuring him."

"Who is the man?" asked Carlo.

"One Tenda, a corporal; a low Piedmontese black-guard—one of the worst characters in the army, I am told."

"A Piedmontese too!" exclaimed Carlo, with unaffected disgust; "to think of Giulia taking up with a Piedmontese, of all the men in the world! Why, it is against nature!"

"I must say that I think Signor Sandro has been very much to blame," continued the priest, "in not making himself better acquainted with the character of the woman with whom he placed Giulia—a retired actress, I learn! It is true that, as far as I can hear, there is nothing to be said against the woman now. She has become reconciled to the Church, and there is no more to be said about it. But Signor Sandro might have known that such a woman was not likely to be a safe protectress for such a girl as Giulia."

"But, then, who would have guessed that our Giulia would need so much protecting?" said Carlo.

"That is true, too, *figliuolo mio*," said the priest. "Well, I must be thinking of walking homewards. It is getting late. Good night, Signor Paolo. I need not wish it you, for you have been taking a slice of it already—a calm conscience makes an easy pillow. Good night, Signor Beppo. We shall have some further conversation as soon as the result of this detestable drawing is known. Good night."

So the priest set out on his moonlight walk to Santa Lucia, satisfactorily reflecting that he had—he could hardly doubt—deprived Victor Emmanuel of one of the likeliest soldiers in Romagna; and had, in all probability, put an end to all inconveniences arising from love-passages between Beppo and Giulia.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BAD NUMBER.

THE communal lists were all made out. There was very little interest attached to that part of the business. It was a matter of course that all except the few names of those who were utterly out of the question should appear in them. Nor did they, when completed, afford to the inhabitants of each commune any even approximative indication of the amount of chances for and against them. For this depended upon the proportion of the number of men required to the number of those liable,—not in each commune, but in the entire military district; and though a tolerably fair estimate of this might be known to the authorities in the provincial capital, the *contadino* inhabitants of each rustic commune were wholly ignorant upon the subject.

So the lists were made out and sent to the town, and the population hardly yet realised the nature and nearness of the misfortune which was about to fall on them.

Then came news that the day for the drawing was fixed. It was a day very near at hand—a day towards the end of May.

Early on the fateful morning the men began to arrive from all sides in the city. They came up in droves from the different communes, and the comparison of them to cattle driven to the slaughter-house was too obvious to escape many of the men themselves, and was with malicious bitterness suggested to them by many a parish priest, as his parishioners were starting from their obscure little villages in the hills on their unwelcome errand. The appearance of the poor fellows when they arrived in the city was also suggestive enough of the comparison. They came with heavy steps and reluctant limbs, not knowing what was going to happen, or what they were to do first, stupidly jostling each other in the crowded streets, and vacantly staring with great wide eyes at the preparations that had been made for the drawing.

Some few parties were accompanied by their priests ; but for the most part those gentlemen did not choose to take any overt share in the matter, or to sanction it by their presence. They preferred to do their part respecting it in the background. A greater number of the rustic parties were accompanied by the older men, and some had women with them.

If the population had looked forward to the day with terror and vague misgiving, the authorities had not been altogether free from apprehension with regard to it. It was well known how very repugnant the measure was to the almost entire population. The government were well aware that this feeling was stimulated and worked on to the utmost of their power by the clergy, and it was feared that disturbances might take place. A considerable force of military, therefore, were under arms at different points of the little city ; and as the rustics, decked out for the sacrifice in their best holiday trim, arrived in the town, they saw bodies of soldiers drawn up, as if to show them specimens of what they were about to become.

In the large open piazza of the city—and at Fano, the principal piazza is a remarkably large and fine one—the crowd was chiefly assembled in front of the *palazzo*

pubblican—the town-hall, as we should say. For there the drawing, which was to award despair or the rejoicing of escape to many a homestead was to take place, in the largest hall of the building. The operation was to be conducted in the presence of the civic authorities. The military powers took no part in the matter at its present stage, seeing that they were interested only in the due forthcoming of the prescribed number of men. Who those men were to be was of interest to the population and to their communal and municipal authorities, but of no interest to the military authorities. They demanded their pound of flesh ; but left the cutting of it to the discretion and convenience of the patient.

It was a curious and interesting thing to thread that anxious crowd, and mark the varying expression of the different groups. There were reckless faces of men, on whom, if the lot should fall, the service would gain little, and the country lose as little. There were stolid-looking boors, who seemed scarcely more capable of appreciating the nature of the change which threatened them than the great meek-eyed, dove-coloured oxen which were their most habitual companions. There were spruce-looking well-to-do youths, the hope and stay of well-regulated households, anxiously talking over the chances of the fateful urn with downeast elders. There were yet more interesting groups in which an aged mother, a sister, or one holding a yet tenderer relationship to the youth menaced with what to her was almost equivalent to death, were the principal figures.

Beppo was there alone. The other young men from his commune had come up together ; but he had felt too miserable and down-hearted to come with them. Yet there was little in their comradeship that would have jarred upon his melancholy mood. The lads of the French rural district, though abhorring the conscription to the full as much as these Romagnoles could do, will go to the fatal urn singing and laughing, hiding the death in their hearts from every eye, and from their own consciousness as far as noise and bluster, and “ Dutch

courage," will enable them to do so. But the simpler, more genuine, less vain, and less self-conscious Italian nature makes no such attempt. They go to the drawing miserable and dejected, and they make no attempt to conceal the fact. One of the most touchingly melancholy of all the popular melodies I ever heard, is the song of the Tuscan conscripts torn from their country by the first Napoleon, which is still remembered in the country districts of Tuscany. Nothing can be further from any pretence of enthusiasm or desire for French "glory."

But Beppo had a far worse heart-ache than any of them,—a heart-ache which he could not discuss with any of them; and he had therefore come up from Bella Luce alone. He was standing at the further side of the piazza, opposite to the *palazzo pubblico*, leaning against the corner of a house, which makes the angle of a street there opening into the piazza, with his broad-leaved *contadino* hat drawn over his brows, moodily and almost absently watching the moving crowd in front of him, and the floating of the tri-coloured banner which adorned the front of the palazzo.

The drawing was appointed to commence at eleven. But nothing ever yet, in Italy, commenced at the hour named for the commencement of it. It was now past eleven, and the crowd were patiently waiting, in no wise displeased or surprised at being detained there. The *gonfaloniere* was still taking his cup of coffee at some café; or the official who kept the key of the hall in which the drawing was to take place had mislaid, and could not find it; or the clerk who should have prepared the balloting urn, and who had had a month or more to do some ten minutes' job, had not yet completed it; or everything was perfectly ready, everybody assembled, and there was no reason whatsoever for not proceeding to business directly,—except that it is always pleasanter to put off doing anything than to do it, and it was still possible to put off the beginning of the present business in hand a little longer. Any one of these, or fifty other such reasons, would have been quite sufficient. It was half-

past eleven ; there were no signs of any beginning being made yet, and nobody of any sort, neither of those who had to operate, nor of those who had to be operated on, was, in the least degree, either angry, or surprised, or impatient. The groups of peasants stood about the wide piazza, as patiently as if they were ruminating like their own oxen ; and now and then some official came to the balcony in front of the great central window of the *palazzo pubblico*, gazed out for a while on the crowd below, and retired again.

At last, at about half-an-hour after noon, a bell was rung as a signal that the business of the day really was about to commence. There was a swaying movement amongst the crowd, and some pressed on to enter the building and ascend the great stairs into the principal hall of it, in which the drawing was to take place ; and others hung back, as lacking courage to look their destiny in the face.

It is not absolutely necessary that any one of those liable to the conscription should come to the drawing. He comes there for his own satisfaction and not for that of the government. He may, if he please, commission any relative or friend to draw for him, or failing this, if the individual does not present himself, nor anybody on his behalf, the *gonfaloniere* puts his own hand into the urn and draws a number for him.

The operation is performed in public. Any one may enter the hall who pleases ; and there generally is a large concourse of the friends of those about to draw, or of merely curious loungers. On the occasion in question a great number of the townspeople, who had no especial interest in the proceedings, had gathered in the hall. For the Fano *beau monde* have not many sources of amusement, and the conscription, at all events, offered them the means of getting rid of a day—an advantage not to be despised in one of those little Adriatic cities.

At the upper end of the huge hall, within a space railed off, is a long, green baize-covered table, on the middle of which is the urn, containing a quantity of

folded slips of paper, all scrupulously alike, equal in number to the number of men liable to serve. Each of these contains simply a number, from one up to the last of the series. The *gonfaloniere*, who is equivalent to our mayor, sits on a somewhat raised chair immediately behind this apparatus. By his side are municipal councillors, and close behind him is the *pubblicatore*, the publisher or crier, whose duty it is to announce the names with their numbers, as they are drawn. The patient puts his hand into the urn, draws it forth, holding one slip of paper between his fingers; he unfolds it himself, reads himself first his fate, then hands it to the *gonfaloniere*, who reads and passes it to the *pubblicatore* to be cried aloud; after which it is duly registered, and then sent to the printer.

The hall of the Fano *palazzo pubblico* was crowded, as has been said, in great part by townspeople who had no interest in the ceremony save one of simple curiosity. Towards the upper part of the large space—which had probably been used as a banqueting-hall in the old days, when there was more of feasting and less of fasting done in Italy than in these latter centuries—there was at a height of some feet from the floor of the hall a sort of tribune, or small gallery, enclosed by a light parapet of iron scroll-work, the elegance of which plainly declared it to be the work of the sixteenth century. In all probability the place thus contrived had been intended for the accommodation of musicians during the Fano feastings. Now it afforded a very convenient place for any one who wished to look on at the proceedings in the body of the hall, without being exposed to contact with the crowd which thronged the floor.

Of course the small privilege of occupying this sort of private box at the representation of the tragi-comedy about to come off, was in the gift of the members of the municipality, of whom our friend Signor Alessandro Bartoldi, the attorney, was one of the most active and influential. It was of course also, under these circumstances, that the desirable place in question should be at

the disposition of the fair Lisa. And there accordingly was Lisa, accompanied by her friend Giulia, between whom and the attorney's daughter a considerable intimacy had sprung up out of the frequent visits of the latter to the house of *la Dossi*, to which she was drawn by—the reader knows what attraction.

La Dossi herself had declined to accompany the girls. She was very far from locomotive in her habits, and had much preferred, when allowing Giulia to accompany her friend to the drawing, to undertake herself, in a spirit of thoughtful and experimental investigation, the preparation of the day's dinner. So there, amid some other lady connections of the municipal magnates, was the superb Giulia, by far the most noticeable person in the little pulpit, or gallery, or whatever it may be called, with the pale and delicate little Lisa by her side, each admirably serving the office of a foil to the beauty of the other : for though poor little Lisa was terribly eclipsed by the magnificently-developed and brilliantly-coloured beauty of the daughter of the Apennine, the pale little town-bred girl was not without her beauty too, of a kind more attractive to some men, perhaps, than the sun-steeped gorgeousness of the other.

What Giulia's feelings may have been, when after her unpleasant interview with Beppo, he refused to enter *la Signora Dossi's* dwelling, and she told him to please himself in the matter ; whether the somewhat boisterous gaiety with which she and Corporal Tenda laughed and talked, while Lisa and Captain Brillì were more quietly engaged in their flirtation in the sitting-room, was as completely and genuinely enjoyed by her as by the corporal ; whether, when she found herself alone in her room that night, there may have been a little of what in medical phrase is termed " reaction ;" and, finally, whether this day of the drawing may have been looked forward to by her with something more of interest than attaches to a mere spectacle of the interests of others, need not at present be too curiously inquired into. This much, at least, is certain, that if anybody had thought to

spy any, the smallest sign or symptom of willow-wearing or down-heartedness of any sort, in Giulia's face or bearing, as she sat by the side of her little friend on the occasion of the drawing, they would have been, agreeably or disagreeably as the case may have been, but very certainly, disappointed. She sat there radiant in beauty, chattering with Lisa, and others around her—the *contadino* shyness and taciturnity having been already got rid of under the discipline and forcing process of her town life.

The process of drawing began. The city of Fano stands in the midst of a rich and populous region ; and the number to be drawn was large. The number of men to be furnished to the army of Italy from that district was not far short of a hundred. But to ensure the certainty of obtaining that number of efficient and unobjectionable soldiers, at least three times that number would be required by the military authorities to present themselves on the day fixed for the medical examination. The probability would be that the last sixty or seventy of these,—that is to say, those holding the highest numbers—would be tolerably safe. Those ranging from a hundred to a hundred and fifty or so, would be pretty sure to be called on to supply the place of those rejected (or those who might have made themselves scarce) among the first hundred. The fate of those holding the numbers between, say, a hundred and fifty and two hundred and twenty or thirty, would be very doubtful, the chances of escape becoming greater, of course, as the higher numbers were reached. Though all those liable draw their numbers from the same urn, and when drawn, form part of one and the same numerically-arranged roll, the operation is performed commune by commune. The young men from each commune come up in a body, and draw in alphabetical order.

Santa Lucia was not among the communes that came first to the urn.

The business went on regularly, and the spectators had plenty of occupation and amusement, watching the look

and bearing of the men as they drew, and as they read their fate. The most remarkable feature of the scene was the absence of bravado. The young fellows who came up to the urn for the decision whether they were to be enrolled among the heroes and defenders of their country or were to return to the plough, made no attempt whatever to conceal their strong preference for the latter destiny. The presence of female relatives and friends and the "galaxy of beauty in the gallery" produced no effect of this kind whatever. The old jousting herald's reminder to the brave knights, that "bright eyes behold your deeds," would have been quite thrown away on the occasion.

The naïve acceptance, admission, and avowal of feelings and affections of all kinds is a very noticeable and curious trait in the Italian character. Sometimes this striking peculiarity seems to our more reserved and secretive northern nature to approach to cynicism; and sometimes to be evidence of an open, unaffected simplicity of character worthy of the golden age. The fact is, that in all respects the Italian nature does partake far more than any other of the characteristics of the golden age of childhood.

The majority accordingly of those who drew the lower numbers made no effort to conceal their chagrin—in one or two instances rising to really tragic manifestations of despair. More than one stout hulking fellow retired from the table sobbing; nor was he felt by any one present to disgrace himself or forfeit their sympathy by such a display of his emotions. On the contrary, those who displayed the most striking and visible signs of grief were deemed to grieve most deeply, and were accordingly most pitied. In a few cases, when it was well-known that the drawer would serve by proxy, and that his interest in the matter was only one of money, his distrust at drawing a number which put him to the expense of providing a substitute was a matter rather of merriment than of sympathy to the bystanders. In several cases doltish stupidity seemed to prevent all

manifestation of feeling and even of interest in the matter. They came up to the urn, did as they were bid absolutely with the slow, lumbering, impassible docility of their cattle, without seeming to comprehend the nature of the consequences which had been decided for them.

To those meanwhile who had already drawn numbers ranging from about a hundred and fifty or so to some two hundred and twenty or thirty, the remainder of the drawing was still a matter of anxious interest. For of course their own chances very materially depended on the sort of men who drew the numbers below them. And every time a low number was drawn by some man, who it was pretty clear would be rejected by the medical examiners, a murmur of disappointment might be heard among the crowd. And now and then the proclamation of some name with a number that manifestly condemned the drawer of it to serve, was received with significant interchange of glances among such of the doubtful ones as knew him, which might very easily be interpreted to express their shrewd doubts whether the individual in question would be of any avail to stand between them and the danger.

"*He* is no good!" one of these anxious watchers would whisper to another, while a glance and an expressive gesture, performed by some scarcely visible movement of finger, eyebrow or shoulder, said clearly enough to the friend addressed that Victor Emmanuel would have to look *very* sharp if he meant his army to be increased by *that* drawing.

And many were even then at work with all their mental faculties deciding the momentous question whether they should "take to the hills" or not. For if such a step were to be adopted, it must be done in the interval between the drawing and the medical examination. After the final making up of the roll in accordance with the decisions then arrived at on each separate case, the men whose names are on it are no more lost sight of by the military authorities. Between the first drawing and the examination they return to their villages, though

they are bound not to quit them. And it is in the course of those days, generally from about fourteen to twenty in number, that the desertions take place. Those who had drawn low numbers, had before this made up their minds what they would do in case of their drawing such. But with those who were in the category of the doubtful, it was a matter of anxious question, and mature consideration of the chances as affected by the nature and character of the men below them, whether they should stay and abide the chances of the examination or not.

Never was medical insight into the constitution and temperament of one's neighbours so valuable.

At last it came to the turn of the Santa Lucia lads to march up to the table.

They came up the hall, some eight or ten in number, fine looking fellows, all of them. The hill populations give but a small percentage of the medical rejections. They are the sort of men the military authorities want; and to get at whom they would willingly reject the townsmen wholesale, if they could find any excuse for doing so. All that little company from the Apennine village of Santa Lucia were fine men, but Beppo Vanni was conspicuous among them, both by his superior stature and by the comeliness of his features.

"There's a fellow for a sergeant-major," said Captain Brilli to Corporal Tenda, who was in the hall with him, amid the crowd of lookers on, as the little Santa Lucia squad marched up the floor. "I hope we shall nab him."

"Why, that's my old acquaintance, Signor Beppo Vanni. I little thought when I told him that we should meet again, how soon there would be a chance of our making so much closer an acquaintance with him. But I am afraid there is not much prospect of making a soldier of him, captain. His father is a rich man, I am told."

"Why, how do you know anything about it? And how upon earth came he to be an acquaintance of yours?"

"Don't you remember, Signor Capitano, my telling you

of the visit we had that Sunday, at the house of *la Signora Dossi*? That is the angry gentleman who was as jealous as a Turk because he found me in company with the superb Giulia. He is a cousin of hers, it seems; and from what I saw then, he would very much like to be nearer related to her; but I saw no signs of any similar intention on the part of *la bella Giulia*. She did not appear inclined to have anything to say to him."

"Oh yes, I remember all about it now," said the captain, scanning Beppo with his eye as he spoke. "And yet," he added, "he is not the sort of fellow a pretty girl would turn away from. I should not much fancy having Signor Beppo Vanni for a rival, myself, corporal!"

"Oh, as for that," said the little corporal, drawing himself up, "it's not always the big hulking fellows that the girls like best—not at all! And besides, Master Beppo did not go the right way to make any girl fancy him. He was as savage as a bear, and seemed more inclined to blow her up, the poor little darling! by way of making love, than anything else. Now Giulia is not the girl to stand that sort of thing. She is as good as gold. But she won't stand preaching from her cousin Beppo, if I know her."

"And she will stand a different sort of talk from a smart corporal of Bersaglieri, eh?"

"Not in the way of anything free and easy, you understand, captain. Lord bless you! She is a real good girl, I tell you. I should as soon think of saying anything that one does not say to an honest woman, to *la Giulia*, as I should to the colonel's wife. She will laugh as much as you please; but all right and proper, mind you!"

"Well, yes, I suppose so. *La Lisa* says that she is a good girl. But I don't feel so sure about her caring nothing for that strapping cousin of hers."

"That for her cousin!" said the little corporal, snapping his fingers. "We shall see, Signor Capitano, some of these fine days."

"One of these fine days, I suppose, when the old uncle at Cuneo has hopped the twig, and the corporal has turned his sword into a ploughshare, eh?" said the captain, laughing.

"Well, don't you think I might do worse, Signor Capitano? Did you ever see a better mistress for the little farm at Cuneo?"

"Have you proposed that enviable position to Giulia, *la magnifica*, yet, corporal?"

"No, not yet; but I have serious thoughts of doing so—freehold land, every foot of it! Why should I not? There's plenty would jump at it."

"No doubt. But you would have to jump at *la* Giulia. I swear she is a head taller than you are, corporal!"

"Not a bit of it! Pareel of nonsense! We are exactly of a height, she and I," said the little man, holding up his head.

"Have you measured?"

"No; but I can see, I suppose."

"A corporal of Bersaglieri ought to know that one always sights a mark less above one's eye than it is. I'd wager she is taller than you."

"Stuff and nonsense! Look, he is going to draw now!"

Beppo, in passing up the hall, had caught sight of Giulia in her tribune, and no doubt she had marked him as he walked up, a head taller than his companions. But no mark of recognition had taken place between them, and the only effect that the knowledge of her presence had produced upon him was to make him feel as if he were walking in a dream, and as if all the scene around him were hazy and unintelligible. His eyes swam, and there was a buzzing in his ears, and he seemed to himself to have a difficulty in bringing his mind to bear upon the business in hand sufficiently to go through with his share in it. As for any care about the result, or any care about anything save the fact that Giulia sat there looking on at the ceremony he was called to take part in, and that though a few yards of space only separated them

there was an impassable gulf between them which must part them for ever—he was wholly dead to it !

He felt as if he were staggering as he stepped up to the table, and the last among the Santa Lucia men (for they drew alphabetically) put his hand into the urn. The evident trouble he was in was of course attributed by the spectators to his dread of the chance which the urn was about to award him. Others had in different ways showed as much emotion, and had excited the pity of the crowd. And now there was a little hush of anxiety and sympathy, especially among the female part of the assembly, with the magnificently handsome *contadino*.

He put his hand into the urn, and drawing forth a cartel, handed it in a dreamy sort of manner, without opening it, as he should have done, to the presiding magistrate.

“Read your number,” said the *gonfaloniere*.

Beppo opened and read, “ONE HUNDRED AND ONE !”

The announcement did not seem to produce any visible effect upon him. He continued in the same sort of stunned dreamy condition as before. He passed the paper to the *gonfaloniere*, who, after casting his eye on it, handed it to the *pubblicatore*, who held it up before the people, crying out at the same time,

“GIUSEPPE VANNI ; ONE HUNDRED AND ONE !”

Of course this was a certain condemnation to the ranks.

There was a perceptible and momentary stir among the audience which seemed in some degree to recall Beppo to himself. He cast his eyes, despite himself, towards the place where Giulia had been sitting, and perceived that her conspicuously noble head and bust were no longer in the spot which they had filled, and that there was a little movement among the women who crowded the tribune.

His look however was but momentary, and he turned from the table, together with the others from his commune, one only of whom besides himself had drawn a bad number, and slowly made his way to the bottom of the hall, and out of the *palazzo pubblico*.

"*Per Bacco!* we have caught our sergeant-major," said Corporal Tenda to Captain Brilli, "and to judge by the look of him, I should say that he knows his father don't mean to fork out to save him!"

"He didn't seem to like it, poor devil!" returned the captain; "but I say, corporal, while you, like a zealous officer, were looking after the recruits, I was looking somewhere else, and I'll tell you what I saw. I saw the future mistress of the little freehold farm at Cuneo turn as pale as death when her cousin drew his bad number, and then she and *la* Lisa left the tribune all in a hurry. I tell you again, I should not like Serjeant-Major Beppo Vanni for a rival with his superb cousin, if I was Corporal Tenda."

"Ah! bah! I have seen them together. She can't endure him, I tell you. Turned pale! I dare say—the room is infernally hot!"

Beppo purposed, as far as he could be said in the condition in which he was to purpose anything, to find his way to the inn, get his horse, and start at once on his return to Bella Lucc. He had not been near Signor Sandro's house, and had with much difficulty forced himself to abstain from the temptation of passing down the street in which *la* Dossi's house was situated. It would be only pain to him to look on that fine big house again; yet he was sorely tempted to do so.

As he was passing out from the door of the *palazzo pubblico* he encountered the little attorney himself, full of business and in a great bustle.

"Oh, Signor Beppo, so you are hit! Never mind it, man. Signor Paolo can afford it, and never know the difference. It is a very different matter with some of these poor fellows. What! cheer up, man! Why have you not been in to see us? Lisa is up in the hall there. Ah, I know one that had a lump in her throat when you drew the bad number. You'll come home with us?"

"If you will excuse me, Signor Sandro, I think I must go home. They will be anxious to hear the upshot of the drawing, you know."

"Well, as you will. But cheer up, man ! I shall see you soon, no doubt ; for you will be coming in about the finding of a substitute. By-the-bye, have you seen your cousin, Giulia ? From all I hear, I did better for her than I thought, in bringing her into the city. I am told she and a certain Signor Tenda, a corporal in the Bersaglieri, are likely to make a match of it. A very decent man, I hear, though he is but a corporal, and likely one day to have a pretty little property of his own."

"I have seen nothing of her," replied Beppo, in a tone of profound dejection. "Good evening, Signor Sandro."

"Well, if you won't stay, I must say good evening, I suppose. A pleasant ride home !"

Beppo went plodding heavily through the streets, with his eyes fixed to the pavement, till, just at the corner of the lane in which his inn was situated, he was roused by hearing himself suddenly called by his name, and looking up found himself face to face with Lisa and Giulia.

It was Lisa who had called to him. She had done so in spite of Giulia's earnest remonstrances and entreaties to her, by look and gesture, not to speak.

"Oh, Signor Vanni ! I declare I believe you were going to pass us without speaking to us. Ah ! you little think what a pain it was to us when we saw the horrid number. Not but what Signor Paolo will get a substitute, of course !"

"It is not his intention to do so. Addio ! Signora Lisa ! I am in haste to return home."

And he was turning to leave them, without further speech.

"But, Signor Beppo," said Lisa in a tone of petulant remonstrance, "are you going away without saying a word to your cousin ?"

"I said too many the last time I had the—the pain of seeing her !"

Giulia had continued all this time with her eyes fixed to the ground, and gave no sign of having heard anything that had been said. But at these last words she looked

up suddenly for half an instant, and seemed as if she was going to speak. But she changed her purpose, and said nothing, again casting down her eyes to the pavement.

"Ah, Signor Beppo!" rejoined Lisa, "I wish you could have seen her when you drew that odious number! I could hardly get her from the hall."

"Lisa, what nonsense are you talking?" said Giulia, indignantly. "Are you mad? You know yourself that I was fainting from the heat."

"I am not the least likely to suppose that it was from any other cause!" said Beppo, with icy sternness.

"But, Signor Beppo," said poor Lisa, beseechingly, and beginning to fear that she had done more harm than good by stopping him in his walk, "you don't really mean that Signor Paolo will suffer you to join the army?"

"I neither know nor care, Signora Lisa, what may become of me. My life is a weary burthen to me. I would as soon be rid of it by an Austrian bullet as in any other way. I am a lost and ruined man. My heart has been broken by a cruel, a faithless, false, and worthless woman!"

Lisa, whose arm was within Giulia's, felt her tremble all over, as these words passed Beppo's lips. She again raised her face, which was as pale as death, as if to speak; but again she checked herself, and remained silent.

"I despise myself," continued Beppo, raising his hand as if in denunciation, and inspired by strong passion with an eloquence that no one who knew him would have believed him capable of. "I despise myself for still caring for one so monstrously false and so vile! I despise myself; yet I know that I can cease to do so only by ceasing to live; and I pray to God that he will soon give me that release!"

He turned from them and rushed down the little lane, at the corner of which Lisa had stopped him.

Giulia stood for a minute, rigid yet tottering, like some tall column mined at its base and swaying to its fall, and then, without word or sound, fell heavily on the pavement.

BOOK III.

PUTTING ON THE SCREW.

CHAPTER I.

THE TWO BROTHERS.

It was early in the afternoon when Beppo left Fano, but it was far into the night before he reached Bella Luce, and he never could give any account of the intervening hours. The tidings of his bad number were known in the village before he came there, for though he had been the first of all those who returned from Fano to Santa Lucia that evening to leave the city, and most of the others had to perform the journey on foot, they all reached home before him. Yet none of them had seen anything of Beppo Vanni by the road. He must have wandered out of it somehow. But he could give no account of himself.

Though it was past midnight, he found his mother sitting up for him. Her first idea on looking into his face as he entered the house was, that he had been drinking to drown the sense of the misfortune that had fallen upon him. The Romagnole peasantry, though not great offenders in that way, are not so wholly free from

the vice of drunkenness as the Tuscan populations are. But Beppo Vanni had never been known to have been guilty of excess of that kind. So much the more heavy, thought his mother, must the blow have been that has driven him to seek such a relief.

But she soon perceived that her son was perfectly sober.

"The chance has been against me, mother; I have drawn a bad number!" he said, as he sat down on the bench by the side of the long table, just inside the kitchen door. He looked haggard, as if worn out by fatigue.

"We have known it hours ago, my son! All the lads have been back at Santa Lucia a long time; and all free except poor Niccolo Bossi and you, my poor boy! Where have you been, and what have you been doing, Beppo *mio*?"

"I don't know, mother. I came away as soon as I had drawn my number. I don't know how I have been so long on the road; I was thinking of other things."

"And yet, Beppo *mio*," said Sunta, looking wistfully at him with the tears in her eyes, "it was not for want of doing the best I could. There was not one of them," she continued, alluding to the mothers of the lads whose drawing had placed them out of danger of being called on to serve, and speaking with a strong sense of the injustice which had been done her,— "there was not one of them who did as much as I did! I burned two candles of half-a-pound each at the altar of the Seven Sorrows, and I promised two more if things went well—best wax, and half-a-pound each, my son! There was no other who did so much!"

"There was no other of them, mother, who had a son with a malediction on him!" said he, looking up at her with profound dejection. "There was no other of the men as willing to go as to stay, no other that was as tired of his life as I am of mine!"

"Oh, Beppo, Beppo! my son, my son! do not speak such words. You shall not go to serve; no, not if I sell all the linen in the great press! It's mine. My hands spun the yarn, mine and the girl's together. You shall

not go, my Beppo, if I sell the last bit of it ; and there's the spinning of four-and-twenty years ! ”

“ Oh, mother, mother, mother ! ” cried Beppo, to whose mind his mother's mention of the share “ the girl ” had had in producing all that linen, had brought back the vision of the quiet happy times when Giulia used to sit by the kitchen fire, or out in the loggia, plying her spindle, and when a skittish word from her was the worst grief in connection with her ; “ Oh, mother, I am very miserable ! ”

“ But I tell thee, my son, that thou shalt not go ! I will speak to the curate—any way thou shalt not go ! ”

“ Mother, I don't care to stay, I tell you ! I had rather go, and never see Bella Luce again ! Oh, mother, mother ! ”

“ Don't say such words !—don't say them ! ” reiterated the old woman. She had poured out all the comfort she had to give, to the uttermost extent of her power ; and she could say no more.

“ Mother ! that poor girl ! Why did you send her away from you ? Why did you send her to her destruction ? ”

“ *Misericordia !* ” exclaimed the old woman, as this new light broke in upon her mind ; “ is *that* the reason why you don't care to stay at Bella Luce any more, or ever to see the place again ? Why, Beppo, my son, she was a good-for-nought ! She was not worthy of so much as a look from thee ! ”

“ Mother ! mother ! She was as good a girl as ever breathed ! ” said Beppo, with a sob in his voice ; “ you know she was, mother ! ”

“ I did think she was ; but you ask his reverence ! Ask the priest, my son. He knows the truth. ”

“ Yes ! and I know the truth ! If she is bad now, who has made her so ? Who sent her to the cursed city to her destruction ? Poor child, all by herself amid good-for-nothing people ! They are all bad in the cities, mother, all of them. Who sent Giulia there ? when it was better,—twenty times over better,—to send her to her grave ! ”

"Why, you know, Beppo, as well as I do, that the priest said it was for the best. It was little enough either your father or I had to say in the matter. Signor Sandro—and he is a very good man, and a 'sponsible—said it was a good thing; but your father would never have sent her for all that, without the priest. He said it was the best that could be done for her;—you know he did."

And from the insistance of *la Signora Santa's* pleading, it might be inferred that she was not altogether easy at heart about the sending out of the poor girl from under her roof, to what she fully believed to have been her ruin. Nevertheless, the idea that it could have been otherwise than right to do as the priest had advised in the matter, was very far from presenting itself to her mind.

"I know this," replied Beppo, "that you and *babbo* and the lawyer and the priest together have sent—body and soul—to ruin the poor girl who was brought up in your house, and who was once the best as well as the loveliest I ever saw, or shall see. She was! she was good!"

It was the time of his farewell meeting with her under the cypress-tree in the path, that his mind recalled to him as the epoch up to which it was certain that she had been good and true.

"I know," he continued, with a tremor in his voice, and with tears in his eyes,—“I know that she is worthless now. And the knowledge that she is so, mother, is ten times worse to me than losing her! It makes me mad to think of it! And that is why I have no care what becomes of me, and would rather die than live! Mother! I am so miserable!”

That refrain came like the inarticulate cry which is the first-taught of all Nature's lessons to every living creature, the instinctive bringing of all pain and trouble to the mother for assuagement and consolation. But the patient's woes had got beyond the sphere of maternal surgery. Santa would have died for her first-born; and she *did* get to the length of articulately telling him

that she would sell all the linen in the great press for him. She had no words to go beyond this. If there was anything beyond in the maternal heart, it was away in the dimly seen abysses which none of us ever fully sound, and which, Sunta had never so much as looked into, and had to remain unrecognised and unspoken.

"I would give thee ease, Beppo, if I knew how," she said. "To-morrow thou shalt speak with the priest; he will tell thee what is best. And now get to bed, my son! Thou look'st as if thou hadst not rested for a twelve-month: and my eyes, too, are heavy."

"Good night, mother!"

And with that the stricken man crept off to the bedroom, where his brother was soundly sleeping.

The next morning he rose to go forth to his work in the fields as usual. He found it less difficult to do that than it had been to find his blinded way through the unwonted occupations of the day before. Habit stood his friend, in guiding his limbs to do their office in the accustomed labour, unaided by any mental guidance.

There passed but short communication between the father and the son as they went forth to the field.

"So thou hadst no luck, *figliuolo mio*!" said the old man, with a snarl that seemed to partake of the expression of a sneer; "and the infidel man-stealers must take thee! The Vannis were never lucky!"

"The chance was against me, father, and I must take my chance," said Beppo.

That was all! The old man said nothing more, but he had many things in his mind.

Carlo appeared to be in a specially communicative mood that morning,—one would have said he was in high good humour even.

"This is a very sad business," he said to his elder brother, when their father was at a distance; "a bad business for Bella Luce! How the farm is to go on without you, Beppo, I don't see. *Babbo* and I put together are not worth you! And yet he don't mean to come down with the money! You'll have to march, Beppo; unless,

indeed, you take the priest's advice, and do as he would have you."

"I don't care much about it, Carlo. They may settle it which way they choose, for me," said Beppo, listlessly.

It was not, however, a matter of indifference to Carlo which way the matter was settled. The priest had said—and Carlo implicitly believed him—that the taking to the hills would involve no lasting consequences; that it would be but for a short time—till the soldiers were gone out of the country. All would then be blown over, and Beppo would return to resume his place as eldest son and heir at Bella Luce. But if he were to join the army, away to the north of the mountains in Piedmont, to fight against the Austrians, perhaps even to cross the Alps, who knows what might happen? It seemed to Carlo's imagination very unlikely that any man should come back again from such a going away! And then—

"If they are to settle it for you, it'll be . . ." and he made a gesture which was sufficiently expressive of "over the hills and far away." "But," he continued, "I don't know that if I were in your place, Beppo—and I wish with all my heart I were, for the good of the family, I do—that I would let it be settled for me that way. Soldiering is a bad trade, I know, mostly; but there is such a thing as thriving at it. And if any man in the world could, it would be such a strapping fellow as you. It would be a fine thing to come back with a title to your name, and a couple of gold epaulettes on your shoulders! Captain Vanni, or General Vanni, mayhap, who knows? would sound very well. And, *per Bacco*! what a handsome fellow you would look, all gold and colours, with a long sword rattling by your side, like one of those officers down in town yonder, that all the girls look after when they pass down the street!"

"Ay, or better still, what a handsome corpse I should make, lying full length on the broad of my back, with an Austrian bullet through my heart! shouldn't I, Carlo?" said his brother, with a dreary smile, which was half satire on the thoughts that he knew very well

were in Carlo's heart, and half genuine acquiescence on his own part in the truth of the proposition.

"Oh!—if you are afraid of that—!" said Carlo, shrugging his shoulders.

"I don't feel as if I was very much afraid!" replied Beppo, quietly, while his eyes looked out into the distance of the seaward landscape, with that expression of vaguely searching which is so apt to accompany the musings of those who feel that all immediately around them has become flat, stale, and unprofitable.

"I know one, at all events, who would look at you in a different sort of way, and speak in a different sort of way, if you was to come back to Bella Luce, or to Fano, as the case might be, Captain, ay, or even Corporal Vanni!"

Carlo fancied that he was feeling his way delicately to hint at a consideration which he dared not urge more directly. But the spot in his brother's heart which he had ventured to touch was sore and sensitive to a degree of which he had no idea. He had already gone far beyond the tolerance of a temper which, placid as it ordinarily was, had been tried by an excess of agony that had left every nerve quivering. The allusion, especially that implied in the last words his brother had uttered, was more than he could bear.

He stood for an instant glaring at Carlo, and then brandishing the heavy triangular spade he had in his hand above his head, he after a moment's pause hurled it far away from him into the field.

Carlo, who had been at first startled and frightened by his brother's movement, recovered himself as soon as the tremendous weapon was at a distance.

"What did you throw away your spade for?" he said, with a half sneer.

"For fear of the curse of Cain!" said Beppo. "Now I am going to pick it up. Don't come after me! Let me work by myself this morning; and never dare again, if you don't want your blood to be on my head, to breathe a word or a hint to me of—of—of what you had in your mind just now."

And Beppo walked away to pick up his spade, and worked in a furrow by himself during the rest of the morning.

His brawny limbs went on with their mechanical task ; but his mind was busy in meditating on the point which he had told his brother that others might settle for him. The priest was desirous, Carlo reminded him, that he should avoid the conscription by flight to the mountains. It was natural to him, and a life long habit, to be guided obediently by any suggestions from that source. Besides, Beppo had—or rather had had, when he cared for anything—as strong a repugnance to the military service as any of his fellow Romagnoles. But now it seemed to him as if that lot was best which took him farthest away, and most irrevocably separated him from Bella Luce, and all its surroundings and memories. Nevertheless he was conscious of a longing he could not conquer to remain within the possibility of hearing of Giulia, and her future conduct. Was it that that sudden departure from the hall of the drawing, and Lisa's point-blank assertion respecting the cause of it, had again lighted up a faint spark of hope in his mind ? He speculated upon it again and again ; and though each time he arrived at the conclusion that it was an absurdity to allow any weight to such a chance circumstance, in the face of what he had seen and heard at the house of *la Dossi*, and what he had since heard from the priest himself, and also, though differently coloured, from Signor Sandro, yet he could not prevent his mind from recurring to the fact, and Lisa's explanation of it. And if there were the faintest spark of hope that, despite all, Giulia still loved him—and girls *were* so difficult to understand, that all things in such matters were possible,—in that case he would not quit the neighbourhood for all the world,—no, not for all the epauletttes King Victor Emmanuel had the bestowing of !

The result of these meditations was that, by the time the hour of repose arrived, he had determined on a line of conduct ; and it was well that he had been able to do

so, for just as the silent dinner at the farm-house had come to a conclusion, and the farmer and his sons were lounging out of the kitchen door, to enjoy as they best might the after-dinner hour of repose, Don Evandro made his appearance, and after a word of greeting to Signor Paolo, and a few of condolence for the misfortune which had fallen on the family to *la sposa*, intimated his desire to speak a few words to Beppo. Beppo had been about to put his hour of rest to profit by getting a little sleep, of which he stood so much in need. But of course he roused himself to do the priest's bidding; and at his invitation, strolled with him along the path leading to the village. The priest was aware of the readiness and acuteness of his friend Carlo's ears, and he chose that his conversation upon this occasion should not be overheard by them.

CHAPTER II.

A PAIR OF CONSPIRATORS.

"YOUR number was one hundred and one, I hear, Signor Beppo!" said the priest.

"Yes, your reverence, that was my number!" answered the young man.

"What is the number of men demanded by the excommunicated government?"

"Somewhere between seventy and eighty from our district, I believe, your reverence. I don't know exactly."

"And it don't signify to know exactly, worse luck! Of course it is quite certain that one hundred and one will be far within the number that will be wanted to make up the roll."

"I suppose so, your reverence! no doubt of it. Of course they all know that it was as safe to have to march as number one."

"And what do you mean to do, my young friend?" asked the priest, with a manner expressive of much sympathy.

"I have not thought much about it yet, your reverence," said Beppo, without being aware how far his words deviated from representing the exact truth.

"But you must think ; and think very seriously too, my son ! It is a matter requiring very much consideration. You are aware, from what I said the other day, that I cannot in conscience advise your father to bring forward the sum necessary for procuring a substitute. Indeed, if it were his purpose to do so, I should feel it to be my bounden duty to use my utmost influence to dissuade him from it. You must have understood, I think, the nature of my views on this point. And I can assure you that they are shared almost without exception by my brother priests throughout the country."

"I dare say your reverence is very right."

"You have not nourished any expectation then, I suppose, that your father should interfere to such a purpose?"

"Not the least, your reverence."

"Well, then we come to the question, what course you mean to pursue," said the priest, again looking hard into the young man's face. "You may speak to me, my son," he continued, "with all openness, not only as the old friend of your family, but as your own parish priest, whose bounden duty it is to assist you with his counsel in every difficulty. And remember, that what you say to me in that capacity is as sacred as if it were said in the confessional. If you feel that you could speak more freely under the protection of that holy sacrament, you have only to say so, and I am ready to hear you in confession. It is the intention and not the confessional that makes the sacredness of the rite, my son."

"In truth, father, I have little to say either in confession or otherwise. The fact is, that I do not seem to care so much about going for a soldier as I did, before—before—before I had been made very unhappy by——"

"I know what is in your heart, my son, as well as if you had spoken it," said the priest, with a compassionate sigh. "My son, you have suffered and are suffering the penalty inseparable from having bestowed affection where it was not deserved,—where the older and wiser friends who knew that there were none of the qualities which should have called it forth, warned you not to place it.

You cannot say, my son, that you were unwarned ; or that if your heart had been more chastened and docile, the misery which has fallen on you would not have been spared you. You must feel that, *Beppo mio*."

There was a long pause, during which the young man kept his eyes fixed on the ground.

"Any way," he said at last, with a profound sigh, "the misery which your reverence seems to know I am suffering, has made me care little about this other trouble of the conscription."

"But it is my duty, my son, to warn you that recklessness is the frame of mind in which, above all others, the eternal enemy of our souls finds an easy conquest. I will not insist on the fact, that the day will surely come when you will look back on the feelings and passions which are now tormenting you, as on the disquietudes of a troubled dream ; when new hopes and new objects will have grown up in your mind, and all that now appears to you of such vast moment will have faded away, and be looked back on by you with a contemptuous smile. I will not preach to you of this, although it is as certain as that the weary body, when it has been refreshed by repose and food, no longer feels its weariness ; because I know how difficult it is for youth to credit it, or to conceive it. But I will remind you, *figliuolo mio*, that there are other grounds on which this question should be decided, besides your own mere liking and inclination. There are duties of the most sacred kind in question. If you were to go for a soldier, as you say, for what cause would you be fighting ? "

"There are many, your reverence, who say that it would be against the Austrians, who certainly have no right to rule over us in Italy ; and that it would be for the good of the country, and to make Italy better and happier in all ways."

"Many who say !" retorted the priest, with infinite scorn in his voice. "But who are they who say so ? Have you heard any of God's ministers say so ? Have any of those who are your appointed guides and teachers,

told you so? You cannot be expected to know much of politics or history. But you know that this country was governed by our Holy Father the Pope, and that his government has been turned out, and his property stolen by force. That cannot be right! You know that the king who has done this wrong, and who wants to take you to fight in his wrongful cause, is excommunicated. That cannot deserve the blessing of Heaven! If you do not know, it is my bounden duty to tell you, that the curses of excommunication will rest on all those who make themselves partakers of this infidel king's guilt, by taking his part, or fighting under his banner. Even taking your own view of the sorrows which have come upon you, as a consequence of refusing to be guided by your natural and appointed guides and friends, even admitting that there is no more prospect or hope for you in this world—if it were possible for an instant to suppose such folly—even if it were so, is that a reason for forfeiting all hope in the next world also? Because you see nothing but misery before you in this life, will you for that reason ensure misery in the life to come also? It is a small matter that this impious government hurries away the bodies of its unfortunate victims to slaughter on the field of battle! It carries them to die excommunicated, and lost for ever! Can you wonder at it, that we, who have the charge of your souls, should be earnest and instant to save you at all hazards from such a fate?"

The priest remained silent for a while to give this tirade time to do its work. And Beppo remained silent also, intently striving to see his mental way among the conflicting notions and ideas that had found their entrance into his mind from different sources. But the priest's unfailing and most powerful ally in the work of subjugating a human soul—a sore conscience—was absent. It was easy to keep old Paolo Vanni in a state of subjection by the exhibition of similar threats and terrors. For he had that within which could only be drugged to sleep by sacerdotal soothing-syrup. And in the case of

his son, the priest had all the advantage of a hazy and clouded intelligence to deal with. But it was curious to see how the clear conscience of honest rectitude struggled against the conclusion the priest sought to force upon it, even though the intelligence was unable to detect any one error in all his theory.

After musing for a while, Beppo looked up with his clear blue honest eyes, not at the priest, but to the blue vault above him, and said:

"All that your reverence has said seems very true ! And yet, somehow or other, I can't get to feel afraid God will be angry with me in this matter. I have no thought to do wrong !"

It did not in any way suit the priest's purpose to enter into a dissertation on any of the monstrous heresies and errors involved in this wholly irregular profession of faith. So he contented himself with saying :

"That is because He knows that you are about to be guided in the right path. The wish to do right, joined, my son, to docility towards those whom God has appointed to show you the right, is always sufficient to secure the blessing of a peaceful conscience. But, it happens in this case, as it generally does happen, that considerations of worldly prudence are also on the same side as duty towards Heaven. Remember what, when the Papal government is restored to this unhappy country, which will assuredly be the case very shortly,—in a few months, probably, as I understand,—will be the situation of those who have deserted their natural allegiance to fight for the usurper ;—of them, and of their families ! Surely you would not, even if there were no other consideration to influence you, you would not bring down ruin and disgrace upon your poor old father ! We clergy have no commission to speak to our flocks about the intentions of the restored government. But I may tell you, Signor Beppo, between ourselves, and speaking as an old friend, rather than in my character of your pastor, that it will go very hard with the families of those who have assisted in the sacrilege of rebellion against the legitimate authority.

Certainly, confiscation of all property, and most probably imprisonment also ! Once again, I say, can you wonder that as a friend, as well as in the character of a priest, I should be anxious to prevent you from committing this sin, and at the same time this worldly imprudence ? ”

On this ground poor Beppo was more entirely unable to contend with his tempter, than on the theological one. Mankind are provided with no internal voice to whisper to them of political probabilities. And Beppo had no reason for not believing every word that the priest had said on that head.

“ I am sure we are all very much obliged to your reverence,” he said ; “ of course I would not willingly do anything that should injure my father or Carlo, or bring any sorrow upon my mother.”

“ I am sure you would not, Beppo ; and these considerations alone should suffice to decide you in favour of the course I was speaking of the other evening at the farm.”

“ But is your reverence sure that I might not be bringing them into trouble in some way by going against the present government ? They, at all events, have the power in their hands now ! ”

“ Yes ! but they have a great deal too much upon their hands to look after one such fellow as you, Beppo ! And besides that, they are too much afraid to make the people hostile to them. There is discontent against them enough, as it is. They will think twice before they do anything to increase it. In taking part with the real government against the usurper, you will have all the really good men in the country with you. In the other case, there will be nobody to stand between you and the just anger of the Pontifical authorities ! ”

“ Well,” said Beppo, “ it is a hard thing for a poor ignorant man, such as I am, your reverence, to tell how to act when popes and kings are at variance, and both parties claim his obedience ; but I will be guided by your reverence in this matter, if you, on your part, will do one thing to please me ;—and I am sure that it is a good Christian deed for any priest to do.”

"Well, what is your condition, *figliuolo mio*?" said the priest, with much surprise and a little displeasure in his voice. "I am not in the habit of making conditions with my parishioners, when I find it necessary for their welfare to advise them to any particular line of conduct. Nevertheless, if it is in my power to do you a pleasure, you know that I shall be happy to do so. You need not have made a condition of it. I must say, indeed, that it would have been more becoming to have mentioned your wish in any other way."

"I humbly ask your reverence's pardon," said poor Beppo; "but I have been hard pushed by sorrow and trouble. And if your reverence would think it well to do this thing for me, it might be the saving of two souls; not of one only—for, to say the truth, I am well-nigh desperate with trouble!"

"Saving of souls, *figliuolo mio*, is more my business than yours. It is not seemly for the laity, let alone the uninstructed laity, to speak of such matters too lightly. It may well be, that you are a very incompetent judge of what may tend to the saving of souls, which you speak of so glibly." For the priest began to suspect, that the good deed to be asked of him might be nothing less than the taking of some step for the bringing together of Beppo and Giulia, and he had no intention to do anything for the saving of their souls in that direction. "Nevertheless," he added, "let me hear what it is that you would have me do. I should wish to content you, if it were only to soothe the pain of the misfortune that has fallen upon you. If it be anything that my duty and conscience make lawful to me, I will not refuse you."

"Your reverence no doubt remembers," said Beppo, with a deep sigh, and after a little hesitation, "all the sad account you were giving my father and mother the other night of—of my unfortunate cousin?"

"Assuredly, it has been a matter of great concern to me. I fear that there is little good to be hoped for her."

"She was a good girl as long as she was with us at Bella Luce, your reverence."

"She was good as long as she had no opportunity of being otherwise. What can be thought of that goodness, my son, which is apt to vanish at the first approach of temptation?"

"Yet we pray, my father, that we may not be led into temptation," said Beppo, submissively.

The priest looked at him with astonishment. He could not have imagined that slow, simple Beppo had ever thought as much of what he was taught to pray, still less that he had the wit so to make application of the fruit of his thinking. But the priest neither guessed how intensely Beppo had suffered, nor knew what a powerful forcer and ripener of the intelligence such suffering is.

"Be cautious and chary, my son, in attempting to apply the sentiments with which we are taught to approach the heavenly throne, to the relationship of man with his fellows. We pray that our Heavenly Father may lead us not into temptation, but we must none the less try the strength of our own good resolutions, by measuring them against such temptations as He does in his wisdom nevertheless think fit to lead us into. Your cousin was placed in no circumstances of exceptional temptation, beyond that which most girls are exposed to, but—we know the result. I think it must have at last convinced you, my son, that those who strove to prevent you from so placing your affections were your best friends and wisest counsellors."

"At all events, father, it was in consequence of the wish of those friends to prevent me from doing so, that she was sent away from her home to the life which has been fatal to her. At all events, she has been sacrificed to what those friends considered to be my advantage. But now that that advantage has been secured," said the young man, speaking with increasing bitterness, "now that I have been made miserable, and she has been made worthless, surely some effort might be made to remedy as far as may be yet possible, the evil that has been done."

"I tell you, my son, such a mode of looking at the matter is mistaken. The evil you speak of was not *done*, it was discovered only. The girl was a bad girl, would have been a bad girl under any circumstances. The circumstances which occurred gave us an opportunity of seeing that such was the case, that is all. And as for remedy, the matter is past that, I am afraid."

"Nevertheless, although we may be afraid that it is past remedy, let us at least try. Let us at least do our part, by taking her away from the temptations which have been fatal to her."

It is true that if poor Beppo's heart could have been anatomised and analysed, there would have been found a very considerable and indestructible residuum of Corporal Tenda in the ashes of it;—true, that when he spoke of removing Giulia from temptation, the temptation he had in his mind was Corporal Tenda;—true also that, despite his representations to his own heart, that all was for ever over between him and Giulia, and this talk to the priest about the object of sending her away having been secured, he would that instant have thought himself the happiest of men, and have rushed into her arms, if only Giulia would have told him that she *did* love him, and did *not* love the corporal; nevertheless he was perfectly sincere in representing, that he had no notion of there ever more being a question of love between them; and in basing his wish that she should be taken from Fano, on the ground of the simple moral and religious duty of endeavouring to reform her conduct.

Poor Beppo. His mind had been so entirely abused by the report of the priest, joined to what he had himself seen, and to the few words dropped by the attorney, which, though they spoke of the corporal in different terms from those used by the priest, yet equally testified to Giulia's monstrous falseness to himself (and when was ever lover, who did not deem *that* the one damning and irremissible sin against morality!), that he really felt that it was a question of snatching a brand from the burning. But I am glad for both their sakes that Giulia

did not hear her respectable and moral cousin thus treating her as a Magdalen, and making her the subject of reformatory philanthropy.

"But even supposing that any good were to be done by so removing her, what is it you would propose, Signor Beppo?" asked the priest, in reply to his companion's last words.

They had strolled up, during their talk, about half-way to Santa Lucia, and were now under the great cypress-tree in the path. Oh! If Giulia could have known that it was just there, of all places in the world, that Beppo was concerting a scheme for rescuing her from moral dangers of improper flirtations with—other men. Oh! if the little green lizards which were basking in the sun among the crevices of the old trunk, and were perking up their heads every now and then, evidently to listen to what was being said, could have blabbed to her what they heard,—that, if anything, might have given Corporal Tenda a chance, and the freehold farm at Cuneo a mistress.

"What would I propose, your reverence? Why simply to undo what was done. To recall Giulia back again to Bella Lucc."

"Have her back again here!" said the priest, thoughtfully.

"I should be absent, you know, *padre mio*," urged Beppo, ruefully.

"You would be absent!" said the priest, pulling his underlip with his forefinger and thumb, as he considered the matter.

"Since I should be either in the ranks, or away among the hills," rejoined Beppo.

"But what would Signor Paolo say?" asked the priest.

"Oh! your reverence knows that my father would be entirely guided by you in the matter. A word from you would bring her back, just as a word from you sent her away."

"And if I were to see no objection in acting in

this matter as you would have me——” said the priest.

“I should see none in acting as *you* would have *me*, your reverence,” said Beppo.

“I presume you would wish that Giulia should not return home till after you have left Bella Luce?” asked the priest, with a look of observation at Beppo’s face as he spoke.

“Oh, certainly not—by no means. Immediately afterwards, but not before,” replied Beppo, with a sincerity in his manner that quite convinced the *curato* of his openness and frankness in the matter.

“Well,” replied the latter, “I do not see that there is much objection to it; and I do not think your father will make any difficulty about it. I am not so sure that the girl herself will be well pleased to return to her old home.”

“I am afraid we have but too good reason to be sure, your reverence, that she will not return willingly. But surely that ought not to prevent us from taking the step in her best interest,” returned Beppo.

“Oh, no! no reason at all, of course. Some few days of notice, I suppose, must be given to that actress-woman, with whom she has been placed. And, on the other hand, some little preparation and forethought will be necessary respecting your——” and the priest finished his sentence by the same expressive gesture which Carlo had used to signify being away to the mountains.

“Oh, your reverence, it’s very little preparation I should need,” said Beppo, speaking in a very dejected tone.

“Ay, ay! but I told you, *figliuolo mio*, that the lads who go out to avoid serving this government will not want for friends; that we shall have our eyes on them; and that means will be taken to aid them in securing their safety. I shall take care—but I must have time to communicate with—in short, some little time is necessary. When is the day that is appointed for the medical examination?”

"The first week of next month, I was told, your reverence."

"Oh! we have good fifteen days, then. Very good. It is more time than enough."

"Will your reverence, then, speak to my father, and cause notice to be given to *la* Signora Dossi that *la* Giulia is to leave her? And Signor Sandro should be told also, I suppose?"

"Yes. I will come down to the farm this evening, and talk to your father after supper. I am sure I hope that a return to Bella Lucc may be the means, under Heaven, of in some degree reclaiming the unhappy girl. And I most sincerely rejoice, my young friend, that your eyes have been opened on the subject; and that you are at last aware what a fatal step any engagement with such a person would have been. Good day. I will not fail to come down this evening."

So the two conspirators separated: the priest returning up the hill to the dinner which was waiting for him, to *la* Nunziata's great displeasure, at the *cura*; and Beppo to return to his afternoon's work in the fields as usual.

And in the evening the priest came down to the farm, as he said he would. And when, after a private conversation with the old farmer in the *loggia*, in which it was finally settled that Beppo was to be found missing some morning towards the end of the following week, Don Evandro remarked, that as he would be absent some time from Bella Lucc, and as the girl seemed to be getting no good in the town, it might be as well, perhaps, if she were brought back to the farm, Signor Paolo made no objection. *La padrona*, when this part of the deliberations of her lord and master and his prime minister was communicated, was delighted at the prospect of having once again at her command, those active and industrious fingers, the absence of which was making itself very sensibly felt in the diminished amount of the weekly produce of yarn.

The precise day for Beppo's secret departure, and the

exact direction of his flight, were reserved for further and more detailed arrangement between him and the priest. Notice, however, was to be given to Signor Sandro, who was to be requested to communicate to *la Signora Dossi* that the farmer would come to Fano to fetch Giulia home on the Sunday week.

CHAPTER III.

A CONFESSION.

WHEN Lisa was left alone with Giulia, at the corner of the little lane leading to the *osteria* frequented by the *contadini* from the Santa Lucia part of the country, in the manner that has been described at the close of the last book of this history, she was not a little frightened at the state in which Giulia was, and not a little indignant against Beppo for his conduct. She was not aware, it will be remembered, how much reason he had for being angry. She knew nothing, in the first place, of the scene under the cypress, which alone gave Beppo any right to tax Giulia with falsehood ; nor in the second place, had she witnessed the unfortunate scene in the great hall of *la Dossi's* house, having been more agreeably occupied herself the while in that slumbering lady's quiet sitting-room : nor could she guess that Beppo's mind had been poisoned by the malicious insinuations, to which what he had himself seen lent such unlucky confirmation.

Giulia had swooned, and, to Lisa's great terror, did

not recover herself for some minutes. Fainting fits are not so common on the shores of the Adriatic as they are in some other latitudes, and the nature of them, consequently, is not so well understood. Lisa feared that her friend was dying, killed by Beppo's cruel words.

The two girls were on their way from the *palazzo pubblico*—where poor Giulia had already received a shock from the announcement of Beppo's bad number, which, despite all her efforts, she had been unable to conceal from Lisa—to the house of *la Signora Dossi*, when they had met Beppo on his way to his inn. The spot was an unfrequented one; and to-day, when everybody in the city was in the great square before the *palazzo pubblico*, it was absolutely solitary. There was not a human being within sight or within call. This was a great comfort to Giulia as soon as she recovered her senses; but it considerably increased little Lisa's embarrassment and distress in the meantime. She hung over her, calling to her again and again by her name in increasing terror, and imploring her to answer her, or at least make some sign if she could not speak.

At last the colour began to come back into her ghastly pale cheeks, and she opened her eyes. After wearily and languidly looking round her for a moment or two, she said:

"Oh yes! I remember it all now! Lisa, dear, how long have I been asleep? Why did you not wake me up? Did I fall down, or how was it?"

"Yes, dear, you fell down. And, oh me! I was so frightened. I thought you were dead or dying. Do you think you can stand up? Do you feel ill?"

"I can get up now," said Giulia, doing so as she spoke by the help of Lisa's hand.

"Are you ill, dear?"

"I feel very strange—much as if I had been stunned. But I am better, now. I can walk home, I think, though I feel a little giddy."

"Lean on me, dear. It will be a long time before I

can forgive Signor Beppo, I can tell him. *E proprio da contadino*!" said Lisa, using the townsfolk's usual expression for signifying anything bearish, or unmannered or ignorant.

"Ah! now it all comes back to me," said Giulia, with a long-drawn sigh. "Ah, yes! now I remember it all. Poor Beppo!"

"Poor Beppo *davvero*! He ought to be ashamed of himself. I never heard of a man behaving in such a way. To say such horrid words."

"Yes, Lisa dear, they were very dreadful words to hear; but—but—but it is not all his fault."

"It is true he had just drawn a bad number, and no doubt he was much put about. But that's no excuse for treating a girl as he did you."

"Yes, he drew a bad number; and he won't like to leave the country; poor Beppo! but—but that was not all that vexed him, Lisa."

"Let what would vex him, he had no business to speak as he did."

"He said I was false and worthless! But I have not been false!" sobbed poor Giulia, and the tears began to overflow her eyes.

"False!" how should you be false? I have been hearing any time this two years from him of his love for you, and how you would never listen to him, nor look at him. What business can he have to talk about falsehood, then, I should like to know? I was all in his favour, and hoped you and he might come together,—mainly because I didn't want him, myself, as you know, dear. But now, upon my word, I think you had better listen to the corporal. Signor Giacopo says he is as good a little man as ever stepped, and will have a snug little bit of land of his own when his uncle dies."

"Nonsense, Lisa!—what nonsense you are talking. You can't really think that there can ever be anything serious between Corporal Tenda and me. He has no more thought of it than I have."

"Well, I am sure I don't see why you should not, nor

why he should not. My belief is, that he thinks a great deal about you in serious earnest."

"Oh, don't Lisa, don't say such things; I don't like it."

"Why not? If there was nothing between you and the corporal, what was it put Signor Beppo into such a dreadful passion? And why did you say it was not all his fault? Whose fault was it, then?"

"Why, Corporal Tenda's fault!" said Giulia, blushing a little and speaking with some hesitation. "He will go on in such a way! And Beppo made me angry that day. And I spoke unkindly to him," said Giulia; and the tears again ran down her cheeks, and her voice was broken by suppressed sobbing; "and when the corporal laughed at him, I laughed too; and I could have knocked my head against the wall afterwards. And I hate Corporal Tenda, Lisa."

"I am sure you don't seem to hate him, Giulia! What is he always coming to the house for? And why do you let him come into the kitchen, and talk and laugh and go on?" said Lisa, the last phrase having in similar context, it will be observed, the force of an "*et cetera*," and being capable of a very extended significance.

"How can I help it?" replied Giulia, not without a certain amount of self-consciousness which imparted a degree of embarrassment to her manner, and a little extra colour to her cheeks. "He will go on in such a way, and he makes me laugh, in spite of myself; and he is so different, you know, from our own *paesani* (the people of our village); and Beppo does not understand such ways; and—and—what could I do, you know, Lisa, dear? Could I seem for all the world as if I was breaking my heart, because I had been sent away from Bella Luce, and I sent away because they were afraid that I—that I should listen to Beppo? Could I now, Lisa, dear? And Don Evandro himself told me the night before I came away"—(here a pause, while certain other reminiscences connected with that same night caused a little half-suppressed but audible sob, not perfectly intelligible

to Lisa)—“the night before I came away, that I was not to shut myself up like a nun, but was to make acquaintance with any people that fell in my way; and—and—that’s all I did, you know, Lisa.”

“Any way, let Signor Beppo have been pleased or not pleased with your knowing the corporal, he had no business to speak in that way, seeing that he never had any right to think that you cared about him!” said Lisa, still indignant at the way she had seen poor Giulia treated. “And I, like a fool, to go telling him that you took on so when he drew the bad number. I don’t wonder you were vexed at me for saying so.”

“But, Lisa, dear, come in just a moment.” They had, as Lisa was speaking, reached the great entrance of the Bollandini palace. “Just come up stairs a moment; I want—I want to speak to you.”

So the two girls went up the great stairs together, and sat down on the stone window-seat of the large window at right angles with the door of *la Dossi’s* apartment, by which the staircase was lighted. The great staircase was as silent and as solitary as the grave, and *la Dossi* was doubtless busy in superintending the progress of her *casseroles*.

“Look here,” continued Giulia, who had taken her pocket-handkerchief from her pocket, and busied her hands and eyes with folding it and re-folding it on her lap, “Lisa, dear. You must not be too hard on Beppo. I suppose he thought that—that I was different from when we parted at *Bella Luce*.”

“Different! how different? If you had always refused to listen to him, why should you not be free to listen as much as you pleased to the corporal or to anybody else?”

There is nothing so provoking in some circumstances as a confidant who will see nothing but the plain logical meaning of what is said to them. Lisa *would* be so deplorably reasonable. Giulia could not fold her handkerchief to her satisfaction. Yet it was not for want of giving all her eyes to the operation. She tried again

and again ; and even her shoulders seemed to writhe and twist themselves with the difficulty of the task. Presently, too, her foot began to beat the pavement with nervous impatience. The handkerchief *would* not get folded right.

“ But—perhaps—Beppo—thought—that—thought—that—I did care for him,” and each word came as if it had been squeezed out of her by some mechanical means that forced out a little panting groan with it.

“ But the question is, what right had he to think so ? ” said the pitilessly logical Lisa.

“ And—and you said just now, Lisa, yourself, that I did not seem to hate Corporal Tenda.”

“ And why should you hate him ? He is a very nice little man.”

“ And Beppo, perhaps, thought I seemed not to hate him—though I *do*. I do, Lisa.”

“ And what if Beppo did think so ? What right has he to object, I should like to know, if you liked the corporal ever so much ? ”

“ Because I told him once, Lisa, that—that—I—hated—all—men.”

“ Meaning him in particular, of course. That is one way for a girl to tell a man that she cannot love him. That don’t bind her, I suppose, always to hate all the men she ever sees.”

“ But I told him, Lisa,”—and here the little panting groans became out-and-out sobs, and the difficulty with the handkerchief became so complicated that the fingers began to twitch and jerk at it in impatient desperation,—“ I told him that I did *not* hate him.”

“ Giulia ! you told him that you hated all other men, and did not hate him. Oh, Giulia ! that seems to me very like the same thing as telling him that you did love him.”

Then, at last the flood-gates were opened, and the great pent-up deeps of poor Giulia’s soul poured themselves forth.

“ And I do ! ” she cried. “ I do ! I do ! I *do* love

him ! I *do* love him better than all the world beside. And oh, Lisa, Lisa ! I am so miserable—so very, very miserable. And I can do nothing but make misery for him. I could have kissed his feet when he was saying those dreadful things in the street, I could. Oh, Lisa ! you don't know how good he is, and how true. And he thinks me false and worthless. Oh, me ! oh, me ! what shall I do ? what shall I do ? Oh, Lisa ! I shall die ! I shall break my heart."

"And you do not care anything, then, for the corporal ? " said Lisa, much perplexed, but persisted in drawing her logical inferences, and putting two and two together.

"Lisa !" cried Giulia, turning on her with the air of an enraged tigress ; "Lisa ! how can you ? I would tear him limb from limb, if it would do Beppo a service, or make him know that I was not false."

"But why not tell him so, then ? Why did you make him think, for these two years past, that you did not care for him ? "

"What else could I do ? And he rich, and his father's heir. And I living there upon their charity. And all of them watching me from morning till night to see if I so much as looked at him. To be told that I paid their charity by snaring the love of their son, because he was rich. My heart is breaking, Lisa—it is ! But I would rather it should break, twenty times over, than live to hear that said. I wish I could die, Lisa ! I wish I could die ! But I am as strong as a horse," she said, shaking her head, and stretching out as she spoke, her two magnificently rounded and moulded arms in front of her, and gazing on them ruefully. "I wish I was *tisiccu*, and could die. Then Beppo might be told afterwards that I was not false, but loved him, oh, so dearly, so dearly. And then he would be free to forget me, and marry some rich wife, according to his father's will."

"But if you as good as told him that you loved him —" persisted Lisa.

"But I did not. I told him there could never be any

love between us. I told him that I would never love him. And now, must I not do all I can to make him believe me, and show him that I was in earnest? Must not I all the more make him think that I do not care for him, if I let him see how much I did care when I left Bella Luce? But it is very, very hard.

"I should tell him that I loved him," said Lisa.

"I cannot do it, Lisa. And you would not, if you had heard and seen the sneers and hints and all the cruel words that I have heard. I could not do it to save my soul. You will keep my secret, Lisa," she cried suddenly, half getting up, turning towards her companion, and seizing her hand in her own: "you will keep my secret?"

"Of course I will, Giulia. Though I think you are wrong, your secret is safe."

"You promise—swear to me that you will breathe to no living soul what I have told you. I could not help telling you, because you were blaming Beppo, when it is I who ought to be blamed—only I."

"I swear to you that I will tell no one, unless you some day give me leave," replied Lisa.

"Ah! that time will never, never come in this world!" said Giulia, sighing heavily. "I must go in, or *la Dossi* will be wondering what has become of me. Are my eyes very red?"

"Yes, very; and you look like a ghost. You had better wash your eyes before you go to her; and tell her that the heat of the hall where the drawing was knocked you up. Good bye, dear! I shall see you again soon—perhaps this evening."

"Thanks, Lisa dear; come if you can. But I hope Corporal Tenda will not come this afternoon. I should be more apt to cry than to laugh with him."

So Giulia let herself in with a latch-key; and Lisa returned down the great staircase alone, with a phase of human nature that was new to her to study.

Lisa could have told her friend, if she had seen any necessity for doing so, that she would be disappointed in

her hope that Corporal Tenda would not make his appearance that evening at the Palazzo Bollandini ; for her own intention of returning was mainly due to an intimation to that effect, which she had found the means of conveying to Captain Brillì in the hall of the drawing, and there was very little doubt that the corporal would accompany him.

La Signora Dossi's dinner, and therefore her *siesta*, took place at a later hour than usual that day, in consequence of the ceremony of the drawing for the conscription, which in the little city of Fano made that day an exceptional one. Giulia, when she went in to her mistress, was expected to give an account of all she had seen at the *palazzo pubblico*—how those who had escaped had rejoiced, and how those who had been hit bore their bad chance, &c. All which she did, poor girl, feeling all the time the heavy weight at her heart, not got rid of at all, but put by to be brought into the foreground again whenever she should have leisure to attend to it.

Then the dinner was got over ; and Giulia had to be scolded because she did not eat, and had to tell lies as best she could about the heat of the room and the fatigue, and so on.

And then *la Dossi* went to her *siesta* ; and the time for bringing out the great heavy sorrow came round, and Giulia sat down in the silent house all by herself to think.

“ Had she been to blame in the matter of the corporal ? Had she been to blame in the matter of that last parting under the great cypress-tree—that greatest event of her life—that most precious memory for all her future years ? ” She feared that she could not quite acquit herself on this latter head. It was a break-down ; a fall from the line of duty that she had chalked out for herself. Had she been stronger on that occasion—had she made a better fight, Beppo would have had no reason to call her false. He would have been spared the suffering of thinking her so. Yet would he, on the whole, have been happier ? Was it not possible that the remembrance of that moonlight

farewell might, despite all, be as precious to him as it was to her? Yes, she had been wrong and weak on that occasion, but she found it very difficult to repent of the wrong-doing.

With respect to the corporal, her conscience acquitted her more easily. Care about the little man, in any such sort as could make any lover or husband in the world jealous? *Che!* She had spoken the truth from the very bottom of her heart, when she had said to Lisa on the staircase that she could have annihilated the corporal, if by so doing she could have served or pleased Beppo. He was less than nothing to her in comparison with him! Had she been pleased, more pleased than was right, with the evident admiration of the corporal? Well, pleased? She had been amused by him. She had found it pleasant to talk to him; pleasant to laugh with him and at his joking. But her heart had been heavy, God knows it had been heavy, all the time! Would it have been judicious to remain glum and moody in *la Dossi's* house? She had come to the city with the firm determination not to wear the willow, to give no curious spy the slightest reason to sneer or suspect that she had left her heart at Bella Luce. Was it not absolutely necessary that she should do so? Would the corporal have any right to think himself ill-used if she told him to-morrow that her heart was, and had long been, given to her cousin? Certainly not the least. If only there were no other reasons for not doing so, how gladly, how triumphantly, would she tell him so to-morrow.

But was there any possibility that what Lisa had said might be true? Was it possible that the lively little man had mistaken her good-humour and frank courtesy, and was seriously thinking of her? Giulia thought not. But it behoved her, at all events, to take care that such should not be the case. But he was one of those men whom it is very difficult to keep at a distance; how different from poor, dear, dear, modest Beppo! It would be far more difficult to make Beppo believe that he was loved, than to make the corporal

understand that he was not. She wished with all her heart that he knew she had no love to give to anyone—that it was all given away! She wished he knew all about Beppo, and her unhappiness. She felt sure that if he did, he would not quiz Beppo any more, and would respect her unfortunate attachment. For after all, he was a good, honest-hearted little man, she felt sure of that. But how was she to behave to him when he came there? Here was already Lisa taking notions into her head. Good Heaven! if any such reports should get about in the town, and should come to Beppo's ears! The mere thought made her blood run cold. It was evidently necessary that she should be more guarded in her manner to the corporal, and when he came next——”

Exactly as Giulia reached that point in her meditations the bit of twine outside the magnificent walnut-wood door was pulled, and the little bell which hung on the inside of it tinkled. Before going across the great hall to open the door, she stepped lightly to the door of *la Dossi's* room, for the allotted time for her nap was just about completed, and, looking in, saw that, faithful to her habitudes, her mistress was awake and on the point of rising.

“There is somebody at the door, Signora,” she said, “so I thought I would look to see if you were ready to receive any visitors. Shall I let them come in?”

“Yes! Let them come in, whoever it is, my girl! I have been alone all day till you came home, and I want to wag my tongue a little! Let them come in. I am coming out into the *salottino* in two minutes.”

So Giulia went to the door, and there, as she had feared, were Captain Brillì, and his shadow, Corporal Tenda.

“Good evening, Signora Giulia! Are we too early? Is the *padrona* stirring yet? May we come in?”

“*Sì*, Signor Capitano! Walk in, my mistress is awake; she will be in the *salottino* in a minute! Good evening, Signor Caporale!”

“Gentilissima Signora Giulia!” said the corporal,

with a military salute, performed in a slightly exaggerated fashion ; "I am delighted to see that you have not altogether deserted this sublunary world for your native skies, as I began to fear must be the case, when you vanished so suddenly from your place in the palazzo to-day ! I was coming through the crowd to speak to you after your—guardian—alien !—drew his bad number ; and when I got across the hall, to that private box sort of a place they put you to sit in, you had vanished, and the Signorina Lisa, too !"

"Did the Signorina Lisa say she was coming here this afternoon ?" asked Captain Brilli.

"*Sì, Signore.* At least she said that it was very likely she might come. She *said*, Signor Capitano, that she would come to see *me* !" said Giulia, looking at him with a smile in her eye.

"Of course ! For what else should she come ?" said Brilli, in the same tone. "Did she say about what time she would be here ?"

"Oh ! I suppose about the hour of the *paneggiata*," replied Giulia. "Will your worships be pleased to walk into the drawing room ? I daresay *la* Signora Dossi has come out from her room by this time."

"I like a large airy room like this, I do," said the corporal. "I think I had rather stay here, while my officer goes to pay his respects to *la* Signora Dossi," he added, giving Giulia a look as he spoke that plainly uttered a very earnestly pleading entreaty that she would remain there also.

"As you please, Signor Caporale ! The room is entirely at your service !" said Giulia, speaking with perfect good humour, but evidently about to precede Captain Brilli into the sitting-room.

The corporal stood looking after her as she crossed the great hall to the opposite door till she had just reached it, then springing after her with a hop, skip, and jump, he said :

"I think I won't stay here after all ; I am disappointed in the big room. All its charm is leaving it—leaving it

now at this moment, and it seems very dull and cold all of a sudden. I think I shall like the sitting-room best ! ”

“ As you please, Signor Caporale ! ” said Giulia, again with unaltering good humour ; “ or if your worship prefers to remain here, to being exposed to the cold of the great room, you are welcome to shut yourself in with the old sedan-chair in the corner ! ”

“ Oh, Signora Giulia, you are cruel to-day ! what have I done to offend you ? Perhaps you were displeased at the result of the drawing this morning. But remember that I am not commander-in-chief—at least not yet. I need hardly assure you that when I am, nobody shall be drawn except those whom your ladyship has no objection to see in the ranks. But in the meantime I confess I thought the blind goddess had done very well in sending the big cousin, who takes it upon himself to superintend the comings in and goings out of the most discreet as well as the loveliest young lady in all Romagna, to learn proper subordination in the ranks. It’s a capital school, Signora, for teaching presumptuous people to mind their own business and not their neighbours’ ”

“ And you have had the advantage of some years’ education in it ? ” said Giulia, raising her eyebrows with an affected expression of surprise.

“ Yes, Signora Giulia ; and accordingly I am, I assure you, minding my own business at this moment—and the most pressing and important business to me in all the world ! ”

“ Dear me ! I never should have guessed that, if you had not told me so ! ” retorted Giulia ; “ but as to the drawing to-day,” she added, after a little pause, in a more serious tone, “ it was in all earnestness and seriousness a matter of great sorrow to me. I would have given much to have saved my cousin from drawing his bad number. It was because I was so vexed,” she added, with a manner that seemed to indicate a determination to speak what she felt reluctant to confess, “ that I left the hall in such a

hurry. And *la Signora Lisa* was kind enough to come with me."

"Excuse me, Signora, I was not aware that you had such a tender interest in Signor Beppo. He is a more fortunate man than I thought him!"

"I said nothing of the kind! I said no word about tender interest," replied Giulia, firing up and flashing the lightning out upon him.

"Well, of whatever sort the interest is—family interest, perhaps," returned the corporal, in a more serious tone, "I am sorry for what makes your sorrow, Signora Giulia; and above all had no thought of offending you. But I confess that the Signor Capitano here, and I, as we were looking on the drawing, congratulated one another on the army having got such a soldier. But I thought that there was small chance of our getting Signor Beppo! I fancied that his father was in a position to buy him off. It seems to me a great pity he should not go. He would be sure to rise to be a corporal!"

"I fancied it was pretty certain, Signora Giulia, that your cousin would pay his bad number by proxy," said Captain Brilli; "and I confess I thought it a great pity that the service should lose a man who would make such a fine soldier. That is the sort of men we want, not a lot of poor, rickety scum from the towns."

"I don't know whether Signor Vanni will buy him off, or not," said Giulia; "but I know that he is very unwilling to serve."

"Why should he be? What is his objection to the service?" said Brilli.

"I am sure I don't know, Signor Capitano; the same, I suppose, that all our *contadini* have. They don't like being sent out of the country, away from their homes ——"

"And their cousins!" said the corporal.

Giulia tossed her head, and turned her shoulder to him, without deigning any reply to this shot.

"It is a very great pity," said Captain Brillì, gravely, "that there should be so wide-spread a dislike to the service throughout all this district : and they are just the best men who manifest the most unwillingness to serve their country. It is a very great pity ; the more so as the government is fully determined to enforce the law. There has been so much difficulty about it, that it will go hard with those who are contumacious. There seems to be a notion among the people," continued the captain, "that they will escape by absenting themselves for a time, a little more or a little less, from their homes, and that all inquiry after them will then blow over. It is a most unfortunate mistake. The men will be brought in and tried as deserters ; or, if they should succeed in eluding the pursuit of our fellows, they must remain bandits and outlaws, under the penalties of felony, all their days. It is quite a mistake to imagine that they will be able to return to their homes after a while."

Captain Brillì said all this as if it was a matter of ordinary conversation. But Giulia could not help thinking that it was intended as a special advertisement to her, for the use and behoof of her cousin. She had no certain knowledge of his intentions in this respect ; but she knew the avarice of old Paolo Vanni, and thought it little likely that he would be persuaded to disburse a sum large enough to procure a substitute for Beppo, she knew, also, how strongly Beppo shared the aversion of his countrymen for service in the army. She feared that he might take to the hills, rather than submit to it ; and the thought of Beppo a bandit, an outlaw, a felon, who could never any more return to his home without meeting a felon's doom, was very shocking to her.

No doubt the thoughts that rose in her mind, as Captain Brillì was speaking, made themselves legible in her face ; and as little that the corporal, whose eyes were very sure to be employed in that direction, read them there.

Then *la Signora Dossi* came in ; and in a few minutes afterwards, *Lisa*.

When she and the captain were fully engaged in paying exclusive attention to each other, Corporal Tenda made a variety of efforts to induce Giulia to come out into the great hall. But they were all in vain. Giulia persisted in remaining close to *la Dossi* all the rest of the evening.

CHAPTER IV.

ACROSS COUNTRY

ALMOST all the habitations that formed the little village of Santa Lucia were grouped together, apparently according to no other plan than such as chance and caprice had dictated, around an irregularly-shaped little piazza, on the lower or valley side of the church. On the other side of it—the side which looked towards the Apennine—were the churchyard, the *cura*, or parsonage, and a half-ruined tower, the only remains of a small castle that had existed here in the days when the possessors of the soil lived on their land and in strong castles; the days before social progress turned them from rebels into courtiers. There were the landmarks of the old social arrangements still in their normal places: the lord's castle on the highest, most prominent, and defensible point of the ground; the dwellings of the peasantry, his serfs and vassals, huddled together on the lower ground at its foot; and the church and the priest between the two.

The old tower was thus the last building of any sort towards the hills. There were, it is true, one or two

other villages higher up, before the open ground of the mountain range was reached ; and the little bridle-paths which were the only roads above Santa Lucia, meandered from one of these to the other in succession. But it was easy for anybody who had a general knowledge of the country, to reach the open hill-side without passing through these. It might have been rather difficult for one having no such knowledge to do so, for the country was broken into a labyrinth of little valleys, each with its small stream, ready to become a scarcely passable torrent after a little rain ; and although it appeared easy enough to a wayfarer to steer his course directly for the high tops to the westward and northward of him when he stood at the top of any one of the lower hills, no sooner had he descended into the intervening valley, and plunged among the woods with which most of these valleys are more or less clothed, than he found himself wholly at a loss as to his direction and bearings. It was a difficult region, in short, for "going across country ;" and a stranger under the necessity of traversing it, soon found that his most advisable plan was to bear with the tortuosity of the bridle-paths, and submit to be conducted to each hill-side hamlet in succession. Those to the manner born, however, knew how to reach the upper hills at need by a much more direct and shorter route.

It was about three o'clock in the morning of a day some five or six days later than the date of the conversation given in the last chapter, that Beppo was standing in the deep shade of the western wall of the old tower above mentioned. The gloom was deepest on that side, and it was the side furthest away from the habitations of the village. But the precaution, if precaution it was, which had led him to choose that side for his watch, was little needed ; for the moon that had lighted him home on his return from Fano after the day of the drawing, had waned ; and the night was dark enough on all sides for the purposes of any who had deeds of darkness to do.

And Beppo Vanni, honest Beppo, who had never done

anything that all the world might not have been witness to, for aught he cared—(save and except, indeed, that never-to-be-forgotten deed perpetrated in the moonlight under the half-way cypress!)—frank-eyed, up-looking Beppo, who had never quailed or dropped his glance before the eye of any man, was now to be numbered among those who loved not the light because their deeds were evil.

Evil! In all honesty and truth he did not know it to be such; had every reason, indeed, to believe it to be the reverse. He was acting according to the best of his lights, and according to the counsel of the guide he had been taught to look up to, revere, and obey from his childhood upwards! Nevertheless, the honest, upright, open instincts of the man protested against the enterprise he was engaged in. It was exceedingly painful to him to be sneaking in the dark like a malefactor, fearing to be seen, and starting at every sound. It was not the idea of breaking the law that was shocking to him. The Romagnole peasant, ex-subject of the Papal government, had small reverence for *law* as such; no idea that honour or morality was in any wise connected with the observance of it. It was the darkness, the skulking, the consciousness that it behoved him to be unseen, not only by the myrmidons of the law—an honest man's natural enemies, according to Romagnole peasant-philosophy—but by his own comrades and fellows, that oppressed him. And specially it was inexpressibly painful to him to leave Bella Luce under such circumstances. In talking to the priest upon the subject previously he had never realised how it would feel, this sneaking away, and leaving his friends and acquaintance to discover in the morning that he was missing. Now, the step he had taken was so repugnant to him, that he was on the point of returning to the farm-house while it was yet time, and telling the priest in the morning that he had finally determined on accepting service in the army as his lot in life, when the recollection came over him, that it was only by conforming to the priest's counsel that he could obtain the recall of

Giulia from the city. To shrink from the course he had embarked in would be to insure her continuance in the society of that accursed man. The blood rushed to his head and clouded his eyes as the thought shaped itself with maddening distinctness of representation in his mind. No! come what might come to him—let him himself become what he might—that should not be. He would save her from that, at all events. It was horrible to think that even during these days they were together; and he was in a hurry to start at once on his path of exile, as if the performance of his part of the pact would hasten the coming of the moment when she would be snatched out of that man's reach.

There was yet, however, one more thing to be done before Beppo could start on the journey that was to make an outlaw and a bandit of him. He was waiting there behind the old tower, by appointment, for a last meeting with the priest. That active and enterprising intriguer chose to see his man off, and to give him certain instructions for the facilitation of the object in view, when there should be no possibility of his making any confidences at Bella Luce or at Santa Lucia on the subject. It was necessary that these instructions should be precise with regard to certain names of places and persons which were to serve as passwords and means of recognition. For, as may be imagined, Don Evandro was not the man to put anything in writing in such a business.

It has been mentioned that one other Santa Lucia man besides Beppo had drawn a number which condemned him to serve. But Don Evandro did not intend that any parishioner of his should swell the ranks of the excommunicate army. He had taken due care that this companion in Beppo's misfortune should also be found wanting, when the day of the examination came. But he had avoided saying anything to Beppo on this subject. The man in question was of a different class, and of a very different character from Beppo; and it appeared to his reverence that the two cases had better be treated separately. It would not be likely by any means to commend

the course of action in question to Beppo, to find that he was to be associated in it with his fellow parishioner; and besides, there were certain means of facilitation and provisions for the well-being of Beppo Vanni to be made, which the priest either did not care, or would not venture, to put in action in the case of a less valuable and reliable member of his flock. So Beppo, knowing nothing of the fate or intentions of his brother conscript, was to start alone.

The priest did not keep him waiting long. Three o'clock had been the hour named. Beppo, in his nervousness, had been at the trysting-place a few minutes before the time; yet, in coming up from Bella Luce, he had tarried awhile under the half-way cypress. The little bell in the church tower had not yet struck the quarter, when Beppo heard a footstep on the other side of the tower, and Don Evandro made his appearance.

"So you are here before me, *figliuolo mio!*" he said, scarcely above a whisper, though in truth there were no ears anywhere within hearing. "I am glad to see you so punctual; it is a good sign. Now give me your best attention, for it is very important that you should recollect the directions I am going to give you. In the first place, have you brought any food with you?"

"Yes, your reverence. I remembered what you told me. I have bread enough to last me through to-day, and a bit of *salame*" (a sort of sausage much used by the peasantry).

"That is all right. Because, observe, it will be well for you not to enter any village or house in the course of this day. You are sufficiently known in all this district to run the chance at least of being recognised. Not that there would be much fear of any harm from any of the people of our hills. Thank God, they are little likely to feel anything but sympathy for a fellow subject of our Holy Father escaping from the clutches of the infidel government. But there is no telling whom you may fall in with. There are all sorts of spies and evil-disposed persons about the country; and it is very desirable that

no information of the route you have taken should reach the ears of the authorities. Therefore, keep at a distance from all habitations whatsoever during this first day. And for the first night—mark me—make, in the first instance, as directly as you can consistently with avoiding all villages and houses, for Monte Conserva. Then, bearing southward, cross the river at Volpone, under Sant' Andrea, and make for Monte Arcello; and thence go down until you are near the village of Aqualagna. You know Aqualagna?"

"Yes, your reverence; I have often been at Aqualagna; but I have been by the road through the Furlo."

"Exactly so. That would be the usual way to go there, and much shorter than the route I have traced for you. But it is very desirable that you should put yourself on the other side of the Furlo, but should not pass through it. You understand?"

The Furlo, it must be explained, is a very remarkable passage bored through the living rock by the Romans, by means of which the high road of communication between Umbria, Perugia, and Rome, and all the region to the south-west of the Apennines on the one side, and Romagna and the cities of the Adriatic on the other, is enabled to thread the valley of the Cardigliano torrent, instead of climbing the mountains, as it must have done if these great road makers—the ancient masters of the world—had not opened this extraordinary passage. The Furlo is situated between the towns of Fossombrone and Cagli, a little to the north of the village of Aqualagna.

"Do not attempt to pass by the road through the Furlo," continued the priest; "either now or on any future occasion while you may be out; for that is the spot where the road will be watched, and where any parties of soldiers who may be scouring the country will be sure to pass. Remember to avoid it. By placing it between you and this part of the country without ever passing through it, you will throw all pursuit off the scent more surely than in any other way. The track across the mountains which I have indicated to you is a

long journey, a very long journey, for one day, but not more than such a pair of legs as yours can do : on the following day you may take it more easily. Now, observe : just outside the village of Aqualagna, as you go on to the little bridge over the stream that runs into the river opposite Santa Lucia, you will see a Franciscan friar sitting by the road-side. He will get up as you come up to him, and you will say, instead of ' Good evening, *frate* ! ' ' Good morning, *frate* ! ' Do not say anything else. He will then walk on, and you must follow him till he comes to the door of a little oratory of our Blessed Lady on the other side of the village. He will just give a tap with his stick in passing, and walk on. Then you must go in at the door he struck. You will find clean straw, and food, and wine. Nobody will come near you. Eat, drink, and sleep, and start on your way before daylight in the morning, closing the door after you. The next day," continued the priest, "take your way up the stream of the Cardigliano, towards the little town of Piobico. When you have cleared the village of Aqualagna and the high road, you need not be so much afraid of the villages and the houses. Make your way up the river as far as Piobico. There another stream falls into the Cardigliano, called the Biscuglio. Follow that for a little way from the town, till it brings you to a small priory, called Santa Maria della Valle d'Abisso. It is a very lonely spot, among thick woods, hidden in the deep folds of a very high mountain to the south of it, called Monte Nerone. There you will find five or six poor friars of the order of Miamis. Say to one of them you may first fall in with, ' *Bella Luce di Santa Lucia*, ' and you will be received with such hospitality as they have to give you. There you would be little likely to be found, however long you remain there. But if there should be any danger of a visit to the monastery, the friars will not fail to hear of it beforehand, and there are the means of baffling a whole regiment of soldiers close at hand. First of all, there is the wilderness and woods of Monte Nerone close behind and overhanging the monastery. Then, higher

up the mountain, by the side of a little stream that comes straight down the heights of Monte Nerone, there are some ruins of an old castle—much more than this old tower here; and there are vaults beneath, which the friars will show you at need, and which neither you nor anybody else would ever find without being shown. Have you paid good attention to what I have been saying?”

“Yes, your reverence.”

“And you think you will be able to remember the directions I have given you?”

“I think so, your reverence. I shall not forget.”

“What are you to say to the *frate* to-night?”

“Good morning, *frate*!”

“All right! And what to the friars at Santa Maria della Valle d’Abisso?”

“Bella Luce di Santa Lucia. Oh, I shall not forget *that*, your reverence,” said Beppo, with a deep sigh.

“Well, then, that’s all that there is to be said, I think; and the sooner you are on your way the better. And mind what I said about the Furlo pass! Don’t be tempted to shorten your way by going through that on any occasion. Farewell, my son,” concluded the priest, giving him his benediction with a flourish of fingers *secundum artem*.

“But, please your reverence, how am I to do about getting news from home?” asked Beppo, rather dismayed at the evident intention of the priest to drop this part of the subject altogether. “You know your reverence said that there would be ways of sending word home and getting news from home.”

“Of course—of course. I suppose it is the last of the two that is most in your mind, eh? But that must be left to me. I shall take care that tidings shall reach you. They will come to you through those holy fathers who are going to give you hospitality. Do not attempt to make any enquiry except of them. Tidings shall reach you, never fear.”

“And your reverence has fixed the day for poor

Giulia's return to Bella Luce?" said poor Beppo, timidly, yet anxiously.

"On Sunday evening she will be at home in the farmhouse at Bella Luce."

"And perhaps your reverence would please to let me hear whether—whether her conduct is becoming and such as satisfies your reverence?"

"Yes, yes. You shall have all the budget of home news."

"And your reverence will be sure to let me know as soon as I may come home?" said poor Beppo, innocently.

"Of course—of course. But you must not be in a hurry. Be content with the safe asylum provided for you. There will be hundreds of lads in the mountains, to get away from this accursed tyranny; but I doubt if there will be one among them whose safety and comfort have been cared for and provided for them as yours have been."

And this part of the priest's statement at least was true enough.

"I am not ungrateful to your reverence, indeed! Good-bye, your reverence."

"Once again, God bless you, my son! May good fortune go with you!"

And so poor Beppo turned his face to the westward mountains, which had become just visible in the cold grey light of the coming dawn during the last minutes of his conversation with the priest; and the latter returned to the cura, to make *la Nunziata* believe that he was just up.

CHAPTER V.

SANTA MARIA DELLA VALLE D'ABISSO.

BEPP0 started on his way with a brave spirit and a stout and alert step, but with a heavy heart. The experiences which were gathering around him were all so new and so strange. The future, though he little guessed, poor fellow ! all the consequences that were involved in the step he was taking, was so dim and so vague. The sense of the adventurous and romantic, which to a certain degree would have gilded the unknown future to the imagination of many a northern youth of Beppo's years, had no charm for the Romagnole peasant—spoke nothing to his imagination. The peasantry of these hills is a specially and essentially home-loving population ; in nowise given to adventure, or the spirit which loves to seek excitement in the search for "fresh fields and pastures new." It was grievous to him to leave Bella Luce ; grievous to be absent from the habitual rustic tasks which he pictured to himself as going on in their wonted round there ; more grievous still to be leaving the home of his childhood, like a thief in the night, with precautions against being seen or traced by any one of those who had been

his familiar life-long friends ; most grievous of all, to be leaving his home just as Giulia was returning to it, and returning under such circumstances.

But the die was cast ; and there was nothing for it but to step boldly onwards.

The top of Monte Conserva was conspicuous in front of him ; and the earliest rays of the sun, rising from the Adriatic behind him, were beginning to touch its hoary brow with a pale flickering glory. But all immediately around him was still in darkness. The little stone-paved bridle-way, broken in parts and unmended since more years than the oldest inhabitant of those hills could remember, led to the village of Sant' Andrea in Vado, at the bottom of a close little valley, behind Santa Lucia. There was a ford over the brawling little stream that ran down the valley, carrying its small tribute to the Metauro with more noise than it was worth, and stepping-stones for foot-passengers to the village. But Beppo, bearing the priest's recommendations in mind, and knowing a spot higher up the stream where he could jump it at a place where it ran between two great stones, soon left the paved path, and striking into a coppice, and then across a region of upland sheep-walks, left the village to the southward, and still kept the mountain-top, for which he was striving, right in front of him.

It seemed to be at no great distance from him. But many another hidden valley, nestling in the folds of the hills, and further concealed, most of them by the rich abundance of timber, revealed itself, each deceptively promising to be the last, before the real ascent of Monte Conserva was reached.

Notwithstanding his precaution and his intimate knowledge of the country, it would have been difficult for Beppo to have avoided meeting some villager going a-field if he had traversed the earlier part of his route at a later hour. But by the time that the sun had risen sufficiently high to illuminate the valleys, and call up the *contadini* to their labour, he had reached a high ridge of sterile and uninhabited country, which forms the bound-

dary of the great valley of the Metauro and the great watershed of the streamlets which run into it from the north. The valley was far below him on his left hand, and he was leaving the town of Fossombrone, situated in its bottom, behind him. To his right and in front of him were the forest-covered heights of Santa Maria delle Selve—Our Lady of the Woods. It was nearly ten o'clock, and he had been walking almost six hours, when he reached the high end of the ridge along which he had been travelling, called Monte Conserva. There he sat down to rest himself under the shady wall of a little deserted oratory, called S. Maria del Monte, close to which a tiny rill trickled out of the hill-side, and supplied him with the means of washing down his breakfast of very dry bread and *salame*.

From that point he was to turn southwards, descend into the valley, and cross the Metauro by the bridge of Volpone. It was thus necessary for him to pass through a cultivated and comparatively thickly inhabited zone of lowlands before again striking into the hills on the other side of the Metauro. He had already, however, reached a distance from Bella Luce which made the chances of his being recognised by any one he might happen to meet very small; and in order, according to the priest's recommendations, to reduce them to a minimum, he determined to rest under the wall of S. Maria del Monte long enough, so to time his walk across the valley as to make it coincide with the hours of repose from noon till two. At that time of year, and that hour, the chances were that he might pass the valley and the bridge without seeing a human being.

The hills on either side press more closely upon the stream at the point selected for Beppo's crossing it, than either above or below that spot. The valley is very narrow there, and by two o'clock he had once more reached a roadless district of very sparsely inhabited hills on the southern side of the Metauro, without having encountered a single soul. The high mass of Monte Arcello was now in his front, and due south; and the

celebrated Pass of the Furlo was running nearly parallel to his course some six or seven miles on his left hand.

The sun was already beginning to dip behind the higher ridges of the main chain of the Apennines to the westward by the time Monte Arcello was reached, and Beppo found that such a day's journey as he had made over a never-ending succession of hills and valleys was much harder work than pruning vines all day. He had not much further to go, however, to reach Aqualagna, the village on the high road where he was to fall in with the promised friar. Aqualagna might have been reached from Santa Lucia by descending at once into the valley of the Metauro, and following it through the town of Fossombrone, and thence by the Furlo Pass, in little more than half the distance, and with less than half the labour it had cost Beppo to reach it. But if he had followed that route he might have been seen and marked by a hundred different people. At Fossombrone, at all events, he would have been sure to have left a very easily found trace of his passage. Whereas, by the way he had taken, making a sudden angle, and changing his course from westwards to southwards at Monte Conserva, he had travelled all the way without one encounter.

It was late—much after the hour at which the labouring population mostly go to their beds—when he approached Aqualagna, so much so, that he feared he should lose the shelter and supper that had been promised him for that night, in consequence of the friar, whom he was to find on the bridge, having given him up. It was not so, however. As he neared the little bridge, there, sitting on a stone by the end of the parapet wall, was the motionless figure of a Franciscan friar, with one of those huge white felt hats worn when travelling by some one or other of the numerous branches and families into which the great order is divided. The figure rose as Beppo came up, and instantly on being addressed by him with the strange salutation, “Good *morning*, brother!” moved on without reply, and preceded him into the village. They passed through the now silent and soli-

tary village street, and all fell out according to the prediction of Don Evandro, with the exactitude and precision of the fulfilment of the enchantments of a fairy tale. The silent friar proceeded through the village and out into the fields at the other end of it, passed in front of a small chapel or oratory—the miniature little dwelling attached to which seemed, as far as any outward and visible sign went, to be uninhabited—just struck the door of the chapel with his staff as he passed it, and walked on, without ever turning round to look at the result of his performance. It must be supposed that looking round had not made part of his instructions.

Beppo pushed the door, and found that it was open. There was abundance of clean straw on the brick-paved floor; and there, on the little wooden dais at the foot of the altar, were a flask of wine, some bread, and some slices of ham. And none of the various troubles, and sorrows, and anxieties, which were pressing on Beppo's mind, prevented him from making a very hearty supper, and enjoying immediately after it the "*Somnus agrestium lenis virorum*," which disdained the little chapel of the Madonna as little as the shady bank or Tempe itself.

The road which, coming from the north-east through the Furlo Pass, has followed as far as Aqualagna the course of the Cardigliano, quits it at that point to avail itself of the valley of another stream, called the Burano, which, coming from the southwards, falls into the Cardigliano at that point; while the latter river, making a right angle, goes off to the westward,—in the direction, that is to say, of the main chain of the Apennine. This was the route which it had been prescribed to Beppo to follow; and it led him, when after a good night's rest in his sacred dormitory he began his second day's journey, into a very secluded, though not altogether uninhabited, district. There was no road up the narrow valley, and only in some parts a bridle-path. And the character of the country became rougher and wilder as the valley approached the upper hills.

The little town of Piobico, which communicates with

the rest of the world by no road whatever, is situated at the foot of the huge mass of Monte Nerone; to the south of it, and at the junction of the Cardigliano and Bisuglio rivers.

Another smaller and nameless stream comes down from Monte Nerone among thick forests, so pathless as to suggest strange ideas of the domestic life of the inhabitants of the dwelling, of which, as Don Evandro said, the ruins are still visible by the side of the stream. There are large vaults also beneath them, as the priest had likewise said. Let us hope that they were not used for any other purpose save the storing of the châtelain's wine. But if such were the case, they certainly made good cheer in the depth of the forest and mountain solitude, for the cellarage is very abundant. It may be supposed, perhaps, that the friars of the neighbouring monastery—more numerous, doubtless, in those days, than the half-dozen or so of poor recluses who still inhabit the lonely spot (if, as is very probable, they have not yet been turned out from their obscure home)—came up to the castle to help to drink the lord's wine.

But it is of the lives led by the wives and daughters of those old châtelains, that the contemplation of their abode suggests the most striking picture. Did they ever get away any more, when they had once been brought across torrents, and through forests, and over mountains, to their lord's castle? Did they ever want, and if they ever did want, did they ever get a doctor? Did they keep any maid-servants? Were they very particular in bolting the doors when their husbands were away from home? Were the friars from the neighbouring monastery allowed to come and visit them at such times? What on earth did they do from morning till night? Here, at all events, they lived, and here they died; and here assuredly they must have been buried; though there is no trace of grave or monument to be seen. But here they live no more! What caused "his lordship's establishment to be broken up?" Somebody must have been the last man who ever slept in the lonely dwelling!

What became of that last man's bedding? Did he lock the door, and mean to come back again, when he went away for the last time? Or did battle, murder, and sudden death, with fire in their train, come suddenly upon the dwelling and its inhabitants some night, and leave thenceforth only a ruin behind them?

The ecclesiastical establishment, which shared those remote solitudes with the lay lord's castle, has been longer lived than it, and its inmates have been more constant to it! The little monastery is not close to the ruins of the castle. They are a mile or two apart. The castle stood further up the hill, and is more completely surrounded—or at least its ruins are more completely surrounded—by the forest. The monastery stands on the border of the stream: it is impossible to conceive a more lugubrious-looking spot. It perfectly well fulfils the idea suggested by its strangely significant name,—“Our Lady of the Valley of the Abyss!”

A shifting of the bed of the little stream, at some period before either castles or monasteries had come into the world, has left a small, flat, dank-looking, semi-circular meadow, at the spot where it circles round the base of the hill in a rapid curve. The very green and very shady, but very damp-looking plot of ground thus situated, is shut in by the almost perpendicular side of the forest-covered mountain which surrounds it in a semicircle. The chord of this arc is formed by the stream, which at either end of the curved space thus enclosed passes so close under the precipitous banks above it, as to cut off the little meadow from all approach save by crossing the stream.

In that remarkably situated spot, some sainted disciple of St. Francis, not having any fear of rheumatism before his eyes, planted a monastery. It is a very small and poor one, and the few inmates look, or probably looked (for, as I said, they have most likely been turned out of the Valley of the Abyss by this time), meagre and poor. There were no fat ones among them. They were all of the lean, gaunt category of monks. The cords

which girded the folds of their brown serge frocks around their loins, seemed as though they gathered together superfluously abundant drapery around the skeletons. The buildings are poor looking, but solid enough, and far more than sufficient in extent for all the purposes of the diminished family which inhabited them. There they still lingered, in the solitary, remote, damp, unwholesome spot ; still tinkling their bells in the solitude every day for five hundred years ; still saying their masses and singing their litanies as they said and sung them five hundred years ago ; still burying their dead in the extra-miserable looking spot between the back of the chapel and the rock of the mountain side !

Beppo succeeded, after some little trouble, in finding his way about night-fall to the little valley in which the monastery of Santa Maria della Valle d'Abisso is situated. He might have been puzzled, however, to find any means of crossing the stream to get to the building save wading through it, had he not chanced to overtake one of the brotherhood, who had been out on one of the begging expeditions, by means of which the mendicants of St. Francis chiefly support themselves at the expense of the labouring population of the surrounding districts, slowly wending his way homeward to the drone-hive. He was labouring heavily along the rough and broken little foot-path, which found its way among the trees and rocks on the opposite side of the river to that on which the monastery stands, laden with a full sack, which hung down his bent back over his left shoulder, and with a small keg suspended under the arm at his right side.

"Good evening, *frate*," said Beppo, coming up with him ; "is it far to Santa Maria della Valle d'Abisso ?"

"I hope not, *Signor mio*," said the friar, looking at him with some surprise, "for I have carried my load a long way, and am tired."

"You are going to Santa Maria, then, I suppose ?" returned Beppo.

"Why it is hardly likely that anybody should be

travelling along this path, if they were not going there; for it leads nowhere else, that I know of."

"Then you may guess that I am going there too," said Beppo.

"So I suppose; though we see a stranger rarely enough to make me suppose anything else, if there was anything else possible," returned the friar.

"Well, that is where I am bound for; so I may think myself in luck to have fallen in with somebody to show me the way."

"There are not so many paths as to make much danger of taking the wrong one, and not so many habitations in the valley as to make it easy to mistake the monastery," observed the friar, with no great degree of cordiality; for the appearance of a stranger there at such an hour seemed to presage a demand on the hospitality of the convent, which, to the mind of the poor begging brother, did not appear to be compensated by the break in the monotony of convent life which the presence of the guest might occasion.

"No; there is no great choice of roads, it is true," rejoined Beppo; "but I am a stranger in these parts, and did not know whereabouts the monastery might be, exactly."

"I suppose so!" replied the mendicant. "May I ask your purpose in seeking Santa Maria della Valle d'Abisso? We don't see many visitors here."

"I have a message to the superior!" replied Beppo, after a few moments' reflection.

"A message for the superior!" re-echoed the friar, stopping to rest his sack on a large boulder stone by the side of the path, while he examined the stranger with more curiosity.

"May I ask who sends it, Signore?" said he, staring at the *contadino* from head to foot.

"Perhaps I had better wait till I can tell my message at the monastery," replied Beppo, after another pause for consideration.

"As you please, but we have no secrets in our house. There are not enough of us for that—by the blessing of

our Lady ; for I don't know how we should keep body and soul together if there were any more of us ! ”

“ Oh, I have no secrets from any of the brethren,” said Beppo ; “ only, if you have been absent long from the house you might not know—”

“ I came away four days ago,” returned the friar, still rather sulkily : “ and it's many a long mile I have been to gather what there is in this sack !—many a long mile, and I shall not be sorry to get home.”

“ Four days ! ” said Beppo, thoughtfully to himself.

“ Yes, four days ! ” repeated the friar, staring at him with more surprise than before.

“ Did you ever hear of Bella Lucc di Santa Lucia, *frate* ? ” said Beppo.

“ Oh—h—h—h ! ” exclaimed the friar, slowly lifting his chin, till it brought the huge rim of his white felt hat into a vertical position at the back of his head, “ that's it, is it ? You are all right, friend ! Yes, I have heard of Bella Lucc di Santa Lucia. Welcome to Santa Maria—though we are not quite there yet. Come on, Signore. Perhaps your worship would lend me a hand to hoist the sack. It is getting late, and it is time we were indoors.”

All this was said with an entirely changed tone, which made it evident to Beppo that his introduction was a potent one, and gave promise of a better welcome than the friar's manner had at first suggested.

So Beppo and his new companion trudged on, one after the other—the path was too narrow to admit of their walking side by side—the friar having declined the stranger's offer to carry his keg for him, till they came in sight of the blackish-gray-looking stone buildings of the monastery on the opposite side of the stream.

“ How are we to get across ? ” said Beppo, when he saw that the bridgeless river was between them and their destination.

“ You shall see,” said the friar, putting down his sack, and drawing a small whistle from the pocket of his frock. He blew a shrill whistle on it, and sat down by the side of his sack to await the result.

In a few minutes Beppo perceived, with some difficulty in the imperfect light, a figure on the opposite bank pushing out a punt from behind a low wall, built apparently on the brink of the stream. By the time the punt reached the centre of the stream he could see that it was another of the brethren who was standing in it, and managing with considerable dexterity the task of pushing it across, which the rapidity of the stream rendered a not altogether easy operation. The shaven navigator, however, brought his craft with the nicest exactitude to the spot where his two expectant passengers were standing, and, tossing the end of a chain to his brother on the bank, stepped ashore without speaking, while the latter dropped the ring at the end of the chain over a stake in the bank prepared to receive it, and the punt swung round to the current.

"Bella Luce di Santa Lucia," said the monk who was returning home from his begging circuit, in reply to the questioning look which the other was staring at Beppo.

"Oh—h—h!" said the second monk, just in the tone with which the first had received the same intimation. "We are prepared to receive you, Signore," he said, addressing the stranger, "and to give you such hospitality as we have to offer, which the Holy Virgin knows is little enough! Be pleased to step into the boat. But it is very little else in any other way that we have to give you," he added, as, having pushed the boat back across the stream, and moored it in its little hidden harbour, he stepped on the shore of the damp green meadow that constituted the territory of the monastery, "I think I can promise you that no heretic soldiers will come to look for you here, or would find you if they did. And now my son," he continued, as the other monk once again shouldered his sack, and they all three stepped across the meadow to a low door almost close under the overhanging precipice which shut in the building, and rendered all other "*clausura*" unnecessary to the strictest monastic rule, on that side at all events, "now, my son, I will show you where you may find at least rest and safety ;

and we will see what we can do to find you wherewithal to satisfy your hunger. There was some good ham in the little oratory at Aqualagna last night, I know ; but we have none such to give you here."

And Beppo perceived that the dexterous oarsman was no other than the superior of the small community.

So there he was, a guest and inmate of the monastery of Santa Maria della Valle d'Abisso, and a refugee from the pursuit of the laws of his country.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CORPORAL SURRENDERS AT DISCRETION.

WHEN the communication from old Paolo Vanni—to the effect that he wished Giulia to return to Bella Luce, and that he purposed coming to Fano to fetch her home on the following Sunday—reached Signor Sandro, it caused him considerable surprise. And when *la Dossi* and Giulia herself were told of it, it was a matter of very considerable sorrow to the former, and of unbounded astonishment to the latter.

Giulia tormented her brain to imagine what could be the motive for this new dispensation, and could find but one. It must be that Beppo had so completely succeeded in convincing his father and Don Evandro that he had altogether given her up, that they had felt that there was no longer any object to be gained by depriving *la Sunta* of her assistance in the house and the produce of her spinning. That seemed, upon the whole, perhaps, to be the most probable explanation. And she thought that it must be so caused her many a sleepless hour of tears and wretchedness. It was of no use to tell herself, again and again, that she had never had any hope that her love for her cousin could be otherwise than an un-

happy one—a source of life-long pain and sorrow ; no use to reflect that she had given Beppo no hope, as far as any remotest chance of ever becoming his wife went. Her heart had never given him up ! No use to represent to herself the cruelty and selfishness of desiring even that Beppo's life should be blighted by an unhappy love, rather than that he should be free—free in heart, to form some happier tie ! Her intelligence had nothing to say in answer to these considerations, but her heart would not accept them, much less be comforted by them. Beppo loved her no more ; and he had ceased to love her because he believed her to be false and worthless ! Oh ! if it were but possible to make him read her inmost heart—every thought, every feeling of it—and then die, it would make all well ! Then there need be no more sorrow, no more trouble ! And she would lie on her death-bed, oh ! so willingly, so happy, on those terms ! But that he should cast her off from his heart, as being—all that he thought her ; that it should have come to that ; that it signified no longer whether she were near him or not, because he was so thoroughly convinced of her unworthiness ; oh ! it was very, very bitter, very cruelly hard !

And how, at home, should she endure to live in the house with him, seeing him daily, meeting him at least twice a day, at the daily dinner and the daily supper, under such circumstances ? How was she to bear the lot that was laid on her ?

Could it be that old Signor Vanni absolutely was too avaricious to pay for a substitute, and intended that Beppo should serve in the ranks of the army ; and that her return had been resolved on, because he would be absent from Bella Luce ? It seemed impossible to suppose this, bearing in mind the horror all his class had for the service. If only she could believe that her recall was grounded on such a motive, painful as it would be to think of Beppo's condemnation to a fate he so much hated, it would be an immeasurable relief to her. As far as the mere being at Bella Luce instead of at Fano was

concerned, the change would be a welcome one to her. For since she had become aware of the necessity of behaving with a more guarded discretion in her manner generally, and specially towards Corporal Tenda, her position in *la Dossi's* house was becoming a difficult one to her. And the more she tried to keep the corporal at a distance, the more pressing and the more serious became his assiduities. Yes, as far as the mere change of residence went, she should be well pleased enough to go back to Bella Lucc.

"It is very vexatious!" said *la Signora Dossi*, one evening as she and her handmaiden sat at their little bit of supper in the kitchen together; "very! I shall never get anybody, and I never had anybody with me, that I liked half as well as I do you, Giulia dear!"

"I shall be sorry to leave you, Signora. As far as you are concerned, you have always been very kind to me—much more than I deserve." And Giulia's lip began to twitch and quiver a little, as the thought of her undeservingness and the consequences of it came into her mind.

"Wherever am I to find a girl that can pull me up out of my chair in the way you do? Lord bless you! it would take a team of these town girls to do it, and then would need a teamster to make 'em pull together!" said *la Dossi*, chuckling at the picture her lamentations had suggested to her fancy.

"What do they want you at home for, I wonder?" continued *la Dossi*, grumblingly "Had you any idea they were going to have you back again?"

"No, indeed, Signora. I am as much surprised as anybody can be," said Giulia, colouring painfully.

"Just as you had learned to roast a bird to a turn, too! It is too provoking. An apoplexy take Farmer Vanni! '*Ave Maria, gratiâ plena, Dominus tay-coom!*' It is enough to make a saint swear!"

"It is very hard on you, Signora, when you have taken so much pains to teach me," said Giulia, who felt that *la Dossi* really was rather hardly used in the matter.

"Ah ! it was a pleasure to teach you. But when shall I get another to learn as you have learnt ? And in another week I'd back you against any cook in Fano for an omelette ! Ah, well ! we all have our crosses in this world, and I suppose they are sent for our good," said *la Dossi*, as she thought with a sigh, half of penitence, half of sinfully complacent recollection, of certain trespasses scored up against her under the rubric "*gola*," which Giulia's proficiency had caused her to incur.

And then the *habitués* of the house had to be told that *la Giulia* was going back to her home in the hills. And everybody professed their regret, and condoled with *la Dossi* on her loss, and said civil things. But the news seemed to fall on the corporal like a thunderbolt. He turned pale, and absolutely became taciturn and thoughtful during the remainder of his captain's visit.

When they were going away, and Giulia was lighting them across the great hall, just as she had opened the door, and Captain Brillì had passed through it first, as was right and proper, "Signor Capitano," said the corporal suddenly, "will you go on, and kindly wait for me at the bottom of the stairs a minute or two ? I want to say a word to *la Signorina Giulia*."

Then Giulia, remembering what Lisa had said to her, knew what was coming, and felt that she had a disagreeable five minutes to pass.

"Signora Giulia," said the corporal, with a little bow of excuse, as he gently took the open door from her hand and closed it, speaking at the same time in a tone totally unlike his usual light-hearted and laughing manner, but without the slightest hesitation or trepidation,—"*Signora Giulia*, this sudden news of your return home has taken me quite by surprise, and makes it necessary for me to take the present opportunity, though it is a somewhat too hurried one, perhaps, to say a few words to you. May I hope for your kind attention ?"

Giulia, though she thought she knew very well the upshot of what the corporal was going to say to her, was quite unprepared for this calm and business-like way of

setting about the matter,—so different from all her former experiences in the same line,—so different from Beppo's half-passionate, half-timid, blush-compelling ways.

"Certainly, Signor Caporale ! Of course I will listen to anything you wish to say. But I can't think what you can have to speak to me about."

(I wonder whether Eve told pretty lies to Adam. I suppose she did, as naturally as the first ducks took to the water !)

"I had hoped, Signora Giulia, that you might have guessed the subject on which I wished to speak with you," said the little corporal, still quite self-possessed ; for he considered all this little skirmishing quite as much *en règle* as the due opening of trenches *secundum artem* before a place to be besieged.

"Is it anything I can do for you up at Bella Luce ?" said Giulia, dropping her eyes ; "I shall be very happy——"

"Nothing of that sort, Signora. I am much obliged to you, all the same," said the corporal. "Signora Giulia, you see before you a man whose inmost citadel you have taken by storm !"

"I, Signor Caporale !" said Giulia, genuinely ignorant of his meaning this time, not having been ever trained to the use of metaphors, and comprehending in the affairs of the heart only the simplest language of the heart. "I, Signor Caporale !" she said, much puzzled to conceive what species of misconduct it was that he was charging her with—"I have taken nothing by storm !"

"Pardon me, lovely Giulia, you have taken my heart by storm ! The garrison has nothing to do but march out, and beg for honourable terms of capitulation."

"Really, Corporal Tenda, I don't know anything about the ways of garrisons ; I never was in a garrison town till lately, you know," said Giulia, really much puzzled to guess whether she was to understand that he was making her an offer of marriage or not. He spoke of his "heart," and something about "honourable terms," which looked like it : but then, what had garrisons and marching to do

with it? Besides, his manner was not like a man making love. Beppo would have done —— various things that she was very much relieved by the corporal's making no attempt to do.

"Bella Giulia," returned the corporal, finding it necessary to be more explicit, "I throw myself at your feet! There is no use in soiling my regimentals on the pavement, but you will understand that my intention is to throw myself at your feet, and offer you my heart and hand,—the heart of, I trust, an honest and loving man, and the hand of a corporal in his Majesty's service. I am in love with your beauty, I admire your goodness, I respect your character. I am heir to an old uncle, who possesses a snug little farm,—freehold land, and most of it pasture,—at Cuneo, in the province of Turin. I refer you to my officers for my character. I ask you to make the happiness of my life, by consenting to be my wife!"

This time there was no mistaking the meaning of what was said to her; but Giulia found it difficult to be equally explicit in reply. So she shook her head, and began tracing devices with her toe on the pavement.

"Signora Giulia," said the corporal, who still hoped that these symptoms were but the results of rustic coyness, "silence is held to give consent."

"Oh, no! indeed it does not!" said Giulia, frightened into speaking,—“indeed it does not! I am so sorry—so very sorry, Signor Caporale; but silence gives refusal in this case. Indeed, indeed, I cannot be your wife!"

"*Gentilissima* Signora Giulia, I am profoundly penetrated with the conviction that I do not appear before you, in my present position, in the light of one who is justified in asking your hand. Circumstances, and, I may fairly say, the urgent need of our country for the service of all its sons capable of bearing arms in the field, have made me what you see me, a poor corporal of Bersaglieri. The position, though a poor one, is an honourable one; but it is not, I am aware, such as your husband ought to occupy. But I beg you, Signora Giulia, before deciding on declining my offer, to give your attention to two points.

The first is, that my present position may be considered a provisional one only ; as it would be my hope to retire, on the death of my uncle—seventy-nine last birth-day, and alarmingly threatened with gout in the stomach—to my ancestral fields,—freehold, and mostly, indeed nearly entirely, rich pasture land ; and the position of my wife, as mistress of the farm of Monteverde, would not, perhaps, be unworthy of your acceptance. The second point which I would submit to you is, that in accepting the hand of a man who has served, even as a non-commissioned officer, you have a guarantee for character, and I offer the most satisfactory references,—which could hardly be found to the same extent in the case of a civilian.”

The corporal had delivered this oration with considerable rhetorical ornament and much appropriate gesticulation ; and at its conclusion he awaited her reply, standing with his body a little bent forwards, his feet in the third position, and his open hands extended a little in front of him.

“I am sure, Signor Caporale,” replied Giulia, by no means insensible to the magnificence of the offer made her, or altogether untouched by the disinterested admiration and affection of the worthy little man, “I am sure that there are more reasons than enough to make any girl glad enough to marry you, if—if—if it was any way possible. But as for me, I assure you that—that—that it is *not* any way possible.”

“And why is it not possible, *stimatissima* Signora Giulia ? If the proposal appears to you a not unacceptable one, wherefore is it not possible ? Am I so unfortunate as to find your heart already engaged ? ”

Giulia did not, in reply to this very direct question, tell him that that was a question which no man had a right to ask—that it was unfairly putting her in a position which, &c., &c.,—for she had never been instructed in the delicate proprieties of the situation ; and the fact was, that the corporal’s question appeared to her a perfectly natural and proper one. None the less, however, did she find it a very embarrassing one to answer.

"Why, Signor Caporale," she said, blushing, and speaking as if she was on the point of bursting into tears, "is there no reason why it may not be possible for a poor girl to accept such a generous offer as yours, except that she is engaged to some one else?"

It was a weak attempt at evasion, and Giulia knew that it was so. And when the corporal brushed away her little card bastion of sophistical defence by saying categorically,

"No reason whatever, lovely Giulia, except that her *heart* is engaged to some one else. If *that* is the case, I must accept my misfortune, and bear it as well as I can. If not, I still hope. *Is that the case?*"

"It would not have been the case," said poor Giulia, crimson all over, and turning her face away from her interrogator with the feeling that she certainly *was* very much to blame in the matter, and owed it to the corporal to soften her rejection of him as much as possible,—"*it would not have been the case,*" she said, apologetically, "*if it had not been that I knew him so many years first!*"

"Ha! Cousin Beppo!" cried the corporal, clasping his hands and dropping his head upon his breast; "the captain was right! Signora Giulia, *il Signor Capitano Brillì* warned me that your heart was already engaged to your cousin. Still he was wrong—it is something to know that he was wrong—in considering that his excess of stature must necessarily cause him to be preferred to me. If I had come first I should have had the prize. Being first is everything in this life. I should have had my promotion for being first inside the enemy's works on the heights of San Martino, if another fellow had not run faster than I. Signora Giulia," he continued, bringing himself with a sudden start into the attitude of military salutation, "Signora Giulia, farewell! Had I come first, I could have loved you well. Your memory will be ever sacred to me, in future years, when I shall have retired to my little (freehold) farm of Monteverde. God bless you, and send you all happiness! *Addio, Signora!*"

"*Addio*, Signor Caporale, *abbio*! I am grateful for all your kindness to me," said poor Giulia, who longed to put herself on the same level of unhappiness with him, by explaining that she was fully as unhappy in her love as he was in his, but did not know how to set about it.

"And, Signora Giulia," said the corporal, from the landing-place, putting his head back through the half-opened door, "pray understand yourself, and make the happy and fortunate Signor Beppo understand, that I should not have spoken as I did when I had the advantage of seeing him here the other day, had I been aware that he was honoured by your love. Tell him I congratulate him, and wish him all happiness with all my heart, and bid him bear no malice. Once more, Signora Giulia, God bless you!"

"It was true, then," was Giulia's first reflection when the door was closed behind the corporal, and she was left in the great hall by herself, "it was true, then, that the corporal was making love to me all this time in serious earnest! I wish, oh! how I wish that people carried their hearts outside, so that everybody might see all about it. Ah! Beppo would know then——" and therewith her mind went back from the corporal's sorrows to dwell upon her own.

It was not long, however, before all those in Fano who were interested in the matter of Giulia's recall home, and who had been surprised at it, were enlightened respecting the causes which had led to it.

Although the young men liable to be drawn by the conscription are not bound even to appear in person at the time of the drawing, or to do so at all till the day appointed for the medical examination, they are bound by law not to absent themselves, without explanation and special commission from their communal authorities, from their homes, during the period which may elapse between those two days. Hence, when, in the course of the morning of the day on which Beppo left Bella Lucca, his absence became known, it was very clear to everybody what the state of the case was. Beppo Vanni was off to

the hills—who would have thought it?—and old Paolo Vanni as able to buy twenty substitutes as one!

And, of course, in a very short space of time the news had reached Fano. Signor Sandro Bartoldi was the first to hear it.

“Whew—w—w—w!” whistled the attorney in long-drawn and dismayed surprise. “Surely,” he thought to himself, “neither old Vanni, nor Beppo himself, can have any notion of the gravity of the step he has taken, nor of the position he has placed himself in. Well, there is an end to everything between him and Lisa, at all events! It is fortunate, as it turns out, that Lisa never took to him. And that is why *la Giulia* is called home all of a sudden! She was sent to town to be out of the way of Beppo. Beppo goes out of the way himself, and she is had back again. But, stop! I see it all! Three days ago comes old Vanni’s letter to say that, by the priest’s advice, Giulia is to go back. Priest’s advice! He need not have told me it was by the priest’s advice. I should have known that very well, without telling. But the priest’s advice to recall Giulia was given, then, three days before Beppo went off. His reverence was strong enough, when the girl was sent to town, on the necessity of separating her from the young man. What follows? Why, that he knew that Beppo was going to take the key of the fields. Yes, depend upon it, it has been all that priest’s doing! I have not a doubt about it. Stingy as the old man is, he never would have dared to refuse to come forward on such an occasion, unless the priests had backed him up to it. Yes, that has been it. Poor young fellow! Poor young fellow!”

And very shortly afterwards the real truth of the matter was known in the Palazzo Bollandini. And Giulia thought the news was very good news. She should not have to face Beppo when she went home the next day; he would not have to serve in the horrid conscription; he would not leave the country; Corporal Tenda and the soldiers all would leave it before very long; then Beppo would return home, and would hear, perhaps, of the

answer she had given to the corporal's very handsome offer—freehold farm and all; and then——though there never, never could be anything between them, Beppo might at last come to learn that she had never been false and worthless.

So Giulia, in her ignorance and her innocence, thought that the news from Bella Luce, of Beppo's flight, was very good news.

But that very evening—the evening before Farmer Vanni was to come to bring her home—there came to the Palazzo Bollandini Captain Giacomo Brilli, although Lisa was not expected there that evening. And he came unaccompanied by Corporal Tenda; and when *la* Giulia opened the door for him, he begged permission to speak with her a few minutes.

What could it mean? Had she rendered herself liable to any military penalties by refusing the corporal? It seemed to her by no means an improbable thing that it might be so.

Captain Brilli very courteously motioned to her to sit down in one of the great arm-chairs in the hall, and then took the trouble of lugging another all across the floor to sit beside her. What could be coming?

"Signora Giulia," began the captain, speaking very gravely, "my friend, Corporal Tenda, has made me acquainted with what passed between you and him the other day."

"Ah, yes! that's it, sure enough," thought Giulia; "I wonder what they can do to me! They may put me under a state of siege, if they will, but they shan't make me marry the corporal!"

"He perfectly understood your reply to him to be decisive, and would not have presumed to speak of the subject farther, but that circumstances have since occurred which produce a very notable difference in the situation. You have heard, of course, of the step which your cousin, who drew a bad number the other day, has unfortunately been persuaded to take?"

The captain looked at her, and waited for an answer,

"*Si*, Signora Capitano ; I know that Beppo has gone away," said Giulia.

"Had you known beforehand, may I ask, Signora, that it was his intention to do so, in case he should draw a number obliging him to serve?" asked the captain.

"No, Signor Capitano ; I never heard of it till Signor Sandro told us here at the *Palazzo*. And I was very much surprised ; for I thought that Signor Paolo, his father, would certainly pay for a substitute, as he is well able to do," answered Giulia, innocently, and with a manner which at once convinced Brilli that she was speaking the simple truth.

"It is a very unhappy thing that your cousin should have done this, Signorina—unhappy for himself, and for all who are interested in him," said the captain, very gravely. "He has been very badly advised," he continued. "Are you at all aware, Signorina Giulia, of the consequences to him of the step he has taken?"

"I suppose he will be obliged to keep out of the way till the conscription is over, and the soldiers gone away out of the country," said Giulia, simply.

"You deceive yourself greatly, my poor Signorina—very greatly," said the captain, shaking his head, and looking at Giulia with an expression of pity that made her feel very uncomfortable ; for it was impossible for her to mistake the grave seriousness of the captain's manner. "The conscription, as far as your cousin is concerned, will never be over, as you call it. He will never be able to return to his home, except to give himself up as a deserter. The government will never cease from considering him as such, and hunting him down."

"Oh, Signor Capitano !" cried Giulia, in great distress and terror.

"It is as I tell you, Signorina. As long as he remains away he is an outlaw and a bandit ; he can never show his face at his home, or anywhere where he would be recognised. He is considered by the law in the same light as a criminal guilty of a crime which renders him

infamous ; he has no civil rights. And this will be his condition all his life, till he is taken as a deserter."

"Oh, Signor Capitano ! Signor Capitano ! have mercy on him ! He did not know ; indeed, indeed he did not know what the law was. Be merciful to him !" cried Giulia, amid sobs which it was impossible for her to repress.

"I have no power in the matter, my poor child," said the captain, much moved by her distress. "I have no authority, either to punish or to forgive. But I can advise. Calm yourself, Signorina, and listen to me. I have no doubt that your cousin was not aware that the consequences of absconding were such as I have told you. I have no doubt that he has been wickedly deceived. But if you have any doubt about the correctness of what I say, ask your friend, Signor Bartoldi, the lawyer. He will, I am sure, tell you the same."

"Oh, Signor Capitano ! I am sure you would not tell me so to frighten me for nothing," said Giulia, who was now all in tears.

"Indeed I would not. Would that I could help you in the matter. But all that I can do is, as I said, to give advice. I must tell you honestly that I came to speak to you at the request of my friend Tenda. Of course, in the present state of your feelings, it was impossible that you should give him any answer except that which he received from you. I regret that it should be so ; for Tenda is a good and worthy man, and will one of these days be in a position to offer a wife a very comfortable and desirable home. However, if it cannot be, it cannot ; and there is an end of that. But when the corporal heard this unfortunate news about your cousin, he was very anxious that two things should be stated to you ; one with a view to any possibility there might still be for his own happiness, and the other with a view to yours, which he charged me to assure you was, whatever his own lot might be, dearer to him than his own."

"I believe he is a very good man. It was a great grief to me to pain him," said poor Giulia, amid her tears.

"The two things he wished me to tell you," continued the captain, "were these. In the first place, if your cousin should persist in sacrificing everything—his home, his position, his character—if he should determine recklessly to live the life of an outlaw and a bandit——"

"Oh! oh! oh!" groaned poor Giulia, as she heard a second time the terrible statement of Beppo's condition.

"It is evident that he must sacrifice also all domestic ties, all claim to the fulfilment of any promise, which, in point of fact, is rendered impossible by the situation he has made for himself. Now, in that view of the case, my friend Tenda wishes you to understand—but without pressing you for any answer, or urging you at all in point of time—that he considers the offer he made to you as still waiting your acceptance."

"Oh, no! no! no!" exclaimed Giulia, wringing her hands. "If all the world was against Beppo, I should love him all the more. I can never love anybody else; indeed, indeed I can't. If he is to be all you say, Signor Capitano—if he must live all his life out on the mountains and in the caves, I would never, never leave him!"

And then, suddenly, a delicious thought flashed through her mind, that perhaps, after all, out of this flight and misfortune of Beppo might come the means of proving to him whether she had ever been false to him—whether she was worthless. If he was to be an outlaw and a bandit, of course all the money and the farm would go to Carlo, and the great barrier between her and Beppo would be removed. And there rose up in her fancy a picture of Beppo, alone and unfriended, poor, with all the world turning its back on him; while she—alone, barefoot, out on the mountains, and hungry, perhaps—was by his side, loving, cherishing, and comforting him. And the thought was a very sweet one to her.

But he did not, would not love her—had already given her up—perhaps ceased to think of her. And that cold thought brought her mind back to the reflection that, in the energy of her rejection of any other love, she had said more than she ought to have said—that she was

leading Captain Brillì and his friend to believe that Beppo was engaged to her. And she sought, with infinite bitterness and humiliation of feeling, to repair the error and undeceive them.

"I would not desert him in his trouble, that is," she resumed, hesitating and blushing painfully; "not that I know that I could be of any use to him, or that he would thank me for meddling with his affairs. But—but all these misfortunes would make me too miserable—too miserable, you understand, Signor Capitano—to think—of—ever loving anybody."

Captain Brillì looked at her with pity, and no little admiration. He thought that he did in some degree understand the nature of the case.

"Well, Signorina, I have given you the first part of my message first, as I was requested to do," he said; "now let me tell you the second. When we heard this news concerning your cousin, it was a matter of great grief to poor Tenda. 'She loves him,' he said, 'and what can such a love produce to her but misery? If it cannot be that her happiness can be made compatible with mine, there is but one way to prevent hers from being wrecked also. Explain to her all the consequences of what her cousin has done.' That, Signorina, as you know, I have already done. 'Tell her,' he said, 'that the only way of saving her cousin is to induce him at once to return,—if possible, before the day of the examination,—then all would be well; but if not that, as soon as possible. If he gives himself up without any great delay, stating that he had been misguided and deceived, that he is ready to serve his time and make a true and good soldier, he will be tenderly dealt with—especially a man of his previously good character. It will be a good example to other deserters. He might depend upon his fault being forgiven. If she loves him, let her induce him to give himself up, or he is a lost man. With his education, good character, and advantages, he would be sure to do well in the army. He would serve his time and all would go well. If he persists in his rebellion, he is ruined and

lost.' All that, Signorina, the corporal desired me to tell you, for the sake of his care for your happiness with another, if it cannot be with him. I may add, on my own account, that every word of it is true. If you wish your cousin well, and if you have any influence with him, or any possible means of exercising it, induce him to return and give himself up. If he does not he is lost. And now, Signorina, I will say adieu! It pains me to leave you in distress; but I can say no more. I will not go in to see *la Signora Dossi* this evening. I must report the issue of my conversation to poor Tenda, who is waiting for me. May I at least tell him that you will be guided by his advice?"

"Tell him, Signor Capitano, that he is very good and generous,—very generous," repeated Giulia, breaking out into fresh tears. "Tell him how much I thank him, and that, if it was possible in any way for me to do what he advises me, I should be so glad to do it. I am very much obliged to you, too, Signor Capitano. Oh! what would I have given that you could have said all that you have told me to poor Beppo!"

"I wish I could say as much to all the poor misguided fellows who will do the same thing," said the captain. "The government knows," he added, "whom it has to thank for the misleading of them. Good night, Signorina. God bless you! I wish you well."

And so Captain Brillì took his leave, and Giulia went to confide her sorrows and her difficulties to the sympathising heart of her mistress.

CHAPTER VII.

GIULIA AT THE CURA AGAIN.

ON the Sunday morning Farmer Vanni made his appearance in Fano, as had been arranged, for the purpose of taking Giulia back to Bella Luce. He was in a more crusty and crabbed humour than usual, for, despite the arguments and the counsel of his friend and guide, Don Evandro, his conscience told him that he had been acting very badly. It is true that he had no idea of the gravity of the consequences of the step to which his son had been driven. He gave perfect credit to the priest's representations on that head. But he knew in his heart that the real determining motive with him, was love for his *scudi*. He knew that other fathers, far less able to do so than he, were making every possible sacrifice and effort to raise the means of procuring substitutes for their sons; and he knew that many of those who were doing so were by no means friends of the new order of things. He knew that he was acting like a curmudgeon, and he knew that everybody else would think so. It was disagreeable to him to show himself in Fano under these

circumstances; and he was in an exceedingly bad temper accordingly.

He went directly, as usual, to the house of Signor Sandro; and perceived at once that he was not received with the usual cordiality. *La Signora Lisa* was not visible. He was not shown into the private portion of the attorney's dwelling-house, but into his office.

"Good morning, Signor Paolo. Take a seat. This is a bad business of your son—a very bad business indeed! I trust you have changed your mind, and are come with the money in your pocket to give me orders to look out for a substitute. If so, all might yet be managed in time before the day for the examination, and everything put straight."

"Beppo knows very well that I have no intention of doing anything of the sort, Signor Sandro. My money shall not go—more of it than I can help—to bolster up the usurping government. But I did not come here to speak of Beppo, but to take *la Giulia* home. Is she here?"

"No! What should she be here for? She is at her mistress's house; and a thousand pities that she should not stay there, so well as they were getting on together. *La Signora Dossi* is as fond of her as if she were her mother. But you know your own business best."

"Yes, I suppose I do. I ought to, at my time of life, at least."

"Oh! I say nothing—not a syllable! I never meddle with other people's business, unless when I am paid to do so. But really in this matter of your son, Signor Vanni, I could not reconcile it to my conscience, if I was not to say a word to beg of you to reflect on the consequences to the young man. Consider——"

"I have considered. You don't suppose I made up my mind without considering, do you? Besides, I act under advice—the best advice. I know what I am doing."

"Oh! If you know what you are doing——Advice! I pretty well know all about the advice, or, at least, can

guess. Signor Vanni, I would not let any man's advice come between me and my son, if I was fortunate enough to have one, in such a matter."

"And if you had a son, Signor Bartoldi, I should not presume to interfere with you in the management of his affairs."

"That's enough, Signor Vanni! I say no more. A wilful man must have his way."

"Can you send and fetch *la Giulia*, so that I may be getting on my way home?" said the farmer, who had, in fact, expected the usual hospitable invitation to dine with him from the attorney. But it was very evident that that was not forthcoming. On the contrary, Signor Sandro said drily:

"Had you not better go for her yourself to the Palazzo Bollandini, Signor Vanni?"

"I don't know the way; and I don't know the woman she is with; I never saw her," said the farmer, testily.

"Oh! as for that, I will send a boy to show you the way. And I think it would be more civil to *la Signora Dossi* to call on her yourself. Besides, I should have thought that you would have liked to speak to her about *la Giulia*."

"I don't want to speak to her; and I dare say she don't want to speak to me! There's little enough of good to hear about *la Giulia*, by all accounts. I won't go to the Palazzo Bollandini. I gave the child up to you here, Signor Bartoldi, and I expect to receive her here from you," said the farmer, speaking with the dogged, impassible manner which the *contadino* assumes when he means to be obstinate.

"Very well! very well! So be it! I will send for her at once;" replied the attorney, not wishing to enter into an unprofitable contest with the cross-grained old man.

He left the room as he spoke, in order to do as he purposed; and when he returned, he found the farmer standing up with his hat on, ready to go, as he said, for his *calzino*, which he would bring to the attorney's

house, so that he might take up *la Giulia* there. The more simple plan would have been to wait for her, and then let her walk to the *osteria*; but the fact was that Signor Vanni was ill at ease in the attorney's presence, and feared a recommencement of his remonstrances on the subject of Beppo. The attorney was by no means ill pleased to get rid of him, but he did not escape without one parting shot, which was a telling one.

"Of course, Signor Vanni, after what you have said," observed the attorney, as he was in the act of leaving the room, "I should not think of returning to the subject of Signor Beppo's affairs, as far as they concern you and him only. But there is one point that it is absolutely necessary for me to touch on. Of course, you are aware that, if your son insists on placing himself in a position which the law brands as infamous, there can be nothing more between him and my daughter. All that scheme is of course at an end. I regret it; but of course you must have been aware that such must be one of the consequences of your determination."

"I acted as I thought proper, Signor Bartoldi; and as I thought for the best. I acted under good advice, as I have told you already. I hope you may be equally well counselled. As for Beppo and the Signorina Lisa, you can please yourself. Beppo will not have to go begging for a wife, I take it."

"Faith! he may have to go begging for some other things besides a wife before all is done," said the attorney. "However, there is no more to be said. So now, Signor Vanni, I will wish you a good morning."

The farmer went and got his gig, taking good care not to return so quickly as that *Giulia* should not have arrived at the attorney's house. He found her quite ready, with her little bundle by her side, and the fresh tears upon her face, in Signor Sandro's hall, from which *la Lisa* had just escaped, as soon as she had heard the *calessino* drive up to the door.

It cannot be supposed that *Giulia's* drive home to *Bella Luce* with the farmer was a very pleasant one. For a

while no word was spoken between them. But as the horse began to walk up the first hill, after quitting the city, the old man said, almost with a snarl :—

“So you are like the bad *baiocco*, Signorina Giulia, you come back again.”

The “Signorina,” it will be understood, was in the old farmer’s mouth purely ironical.

“I did not go for my pleasure, Signor Paolo,” answered Giulia, with a sigh; “and it’s not for my pleasure that I come back.”

“There’s little pleasure to be got out of it, one way or the other, for all I see,” growled the cross old man.

“Very little, indeed, Signor Paolo; Heaven help me!” replied the poor girl, while the tears, which had of late had their reservoirs very near the bright eyes that used to know so little of them, began to run silently down her cheeks.

“There, there’s no good crying about it. There’s the bit and sup for you, being, as you are, a Vanni.”

“‘Worse luck!’” Giulia could not refrain from quoting, after those words of the farmer, which she had never forgotten.

“What do you mean by that?” snarled the old man, turning sharply on her.

“It was you who said it, Signor Paolo,” said Giulia, looking up through her tears.

“Then I suppose I meant it! but that’s no reason you should say it, or think it either,” growled the farmer.

And then nothing more was said till they were going up the last hill to Bella Luce.

“I don’t want to have any talk at home, mind you,” the old man then said, “about anything in the city, not what this fool said, or t’other fool tattled. Do you hear? You say nothing to anybody, and nobody will say anything to you. And I am sure that ought to suit your book best! Do you hear?” he repeated, after a pause. For Giulia was pondering what was the meaning of this

prohibition, and what the sneer which concluded it was intended to point at.

"Yes, Signor Paolo!" she said, submissively.

"Well! mind it *is* yes. And now hold the horse till I send Carlo to put him in the stable."

So there she was at home once more; and old Santa, who was really glad to have her back again, received her somewhat more kindly than the old man; and Carlo stared and giggled, and spoke in innuendos, and tried in vain to make her talk whenever he could get an opportunity, which was, fortunately for her, rarely enough out of the hearing of his parents; and very shortly her life fell into the old accustomed daily routine,—all, with the exception of one great void in it,—one absence which, unspoken of, unalluded to, seemed to make her entire existence and all its surroundings unreal, dream-like, sapless, and feckless.

Of course, after what had been said to her by Captain Brilli, Giulia's great and first object at Bella Luce was, if possible, to find the means of communicating with Beppo. But it was extremely difficult to do this. She did not see any possible means of achieving even the first step, of ascertaining where he was. In fact, there was only one human being at Santa Lucia who was cognizant of Beppo's whereabouts,—the priest, Don Evandro. Giulia naturally supposed that his place of hiding was known also to the members of his family,—to his father at least. But, even if this had been the case, she would have been no nearer her object; for of course she could not ask them for the information. But the priest had chosen to keep that secret to himself. He chose to be the only medium of communication between Bella Luce and the fugitive, for he could not be sure otherwise of what nature the communications might be.

In vain, therefore, Giulia waited, and hoped to hear something said in the family which might afford her a clue. Beppo was never mentioned by them, any more than if he had not been in existence.

And the fatal day of the medical examination, when

his absence would be notified to the military authorities, and he would be branded as a deserter, drew nigh. It came at last; and still Giulia was no nearer to the object, which was now the chief and indeed, it may be said, the only one of her life.

After some days, the thought occurred to her that possibly some chance might arise, some means of communicating with him offer itself suddenly, and be lost for want of her being prepared to take advantage of it. The preparation of a letter was to her, though not, as to many of her class and station, an impossibility, yet a matter of time and difficulty. So she thought that, as a measure of precaution, it would be well to have a letter written in readiness.

The first step towards this was to obtain the means of writing. And this was not altogether so easy a matter as it might seem to damsels living under different conditions of existence. Pen and ink were indeed easily obtainable. For those which Beppo used in the good old days, when Beppo was still at Bella Luce, to make out the farm accounts, and to which Carlo had now succeeded, were kept in a drawer of the great table in the kitchen, and there would be no difficulty in abstracting them at night, to be used in the privacy of her room, and replacing them before there was any chance of their being missed in the morning. But then, how to get a sheet of paper? Giulia's penmanship was not capable of putting what it would be necessary for her to say into the compass of a small bit of paper. A whole sheet of foolscap was absolutely necessary to the achievement of her object. And how to obtain this? It would be easy to go to the village shop and purchase what she wanted. *But che! Ti pare!* As if it would not be all over Santa Lucia the next day. "*La Giulia has been asking for paper! Who is she writing to, I wonder? Eh! some friend left behind in Fano! Girls don't go to stay in the city for nothing!*" &c., &c., &c. And then cross-questioning at home. No! that would never do.

After much meditation on this knotty difficulty, how-

ever, she hit upon a stratagem, under cover of which, she thought, the thing might be done. She might write a letter to *la Dossi*. It was very natural that she should do so. That would be avowable. It would also seem very natural that she should require two sheets of paper for the purpose, for would not one be needed for the rough copy? By this means she thought she might venture to make a purchase of paper openly.

So she said one day to *la Sunta*, "Signora, will you please allow me to go up to Santa Lucia this afternoon? I want to buy some paper to write a letter to *la Signora Dossi*, the lady I was with at Fano."

La Sunta made no objection to this, but told her to call at the same time and pay her respects to *la Nunziata*, the priest's housekeeper, whom she had not seen since her return.

The paper was purchased accordingly—*two* sheets of foolscap paper,—out of Giulia's own private resources; for, thanks to the small modicum of wages to be received from *la Signora Dossi*, who at parting had been liberal in the matter, Giulia was not wholly without money.

"I want a couple of sheets of paper, if you please," said she; taking care to add her justification, for the benefit of the Santa Lucia gossips. "I must write a letter to *la Signora Dossi*, the lady I was living with at Fano."

Then she paid her visit to *la Nunziata*, who made her promise, that if *la Signora Sunta* would spare her, Giulia would come up to the *cura* on the morrow, and lend her a helping hand for a day as she used to do, "before," said *la Nunziata*, "you were turned into a fine city lady."

It was settled accordingly that Giulia was to spend the following day at Santa Lucia.

And that evening, after supper, she quietly took the pens and ink from among the fragments of old accounts, skewers, broken dinner knives, bits of twine, an old almanac, and one or two little prints of saints, in the drawer of the great kitchen table, and carried them off to her room.

She had to write two letters ; and much extra care and labour had to be expended upon them, because it was necessary that they should be composed and executed without the assistance of a second copy.

The far easier and shorter epistle, which was to serve merely as a blind for the other, was, however, soon managed, and ran thus :—

Stimatissima Signora Dossi."

(These words were written at the top of the paper, on the left hand side ; then a good way down, on the right hand side followed the date):

"Bella Luce, —th June, 186—."

(Then another much wider space was left, seeing that the wideness of it indicated the degree of respect in which the writer's correspondent was held ; and then the letter began.)

"I arrived at Bella Luce safe and well, and am so at this writing ; hoping that you are the same. I hope that you have found some better and more fortunate person than me to serve you ; and I hope that she can please you in the cooking. When you see *la* Lisa, and *il* Signor Capitano Brilli, and *il* Signor Caporale, please to give them my kind remembrances.

"Turn over."

(For so low down the sheet had Giulia's abounding respect compelled her to begin her letter, and so large was the writing, that she had already reached the bottom of the page ; and the letter was resumed on the other side no higher up than on the first page.)

"The vines in this district are looking very well. The *grittochammia* (it was the only word misspelt in the letter ; and of course Giulia had no knowledge of it, save hearing it constantly in the mouths of the farmer and his sons) is not much ; and we hope to drink a glass of wine this year. Dear Signora Dossi, I am very grateful to

you for your kindness to me. I try not to forget the things you taught me; but there is little to be done in the way of fine cooking at Bella Luce."

(This filled the whole of the second page, or of that portion of it which was written on, rather, and furnished a line or two for the third page, beginning at the same distance down the paper. Then the whole of the remaining space was occupied by the subscription, carefully distributed in equidistant lines.)

"I am,

"With the most distinguished homage and
obsequiousness,

"Of your ladyship

"The most humble and obedient

"Slave and servant,

"GIULIA VANNI."

The last words written in the very bottommost corner of the paper, in token of the humility of the writer.

This show letter having been thus felicitously accomplished, according to all the prescriptions of correct good breeding and the latest Romagnole genteel letter-writer, Giulia proceeded to the more important and more difficult part of her task.

"Caro Signor Beppo," she began; then, after some time lost in meditation, which threatened to run off into mere castle-building and reverie, drew her pen through *curo*, and wrote *carissimo* over it;—then, after gazing a little at the effect of the words so written, with sudden haste blotted out both adjectives, elaborately satisfying herself that there was no possibility of reading the word that had been written on that spot. How could the reader guess what might have been the writer's first intention? It might have been "odious," or "abominable," for all that anybody could tell!

So it stood, "(great blot) Signor Beppo,

"I know that it does not become me to write to you; and that you have no wish to hear from me; but if you will please to read my letter a little further, and not

throw it away in anger directly, you will see that I do not wish to write about myself. Dear Beppo" (*dear* again carefully blotted out), "before I came home from Fano, which was on the Sunday after you went away, I heard some very dreadful things, which you ought to know ; for I am sure you do not know them. I am sure that you have gone away deceived, and led by bad advice. You think you can come home, in a little time, when the soldiers are gone away. But it is not so. You will never be let to come back any more in all your life till you give yourself up as a deserter. The lawyers and the government say that you are an outlaw and a bandit ; and they will never give over hunting you till they have caught you, if it should be all your life. And then you will be punished as a deserter. But if you make haste to give yourself up, your going away will be pardoned ; and all will be forgotten. If you have been told different from this by any one, it is a wicked falsehood, for this is the truth. And Signor Sandro, the lawyer, would tell you the same. Oh ! Signor Beppo, for the love of the Holy Virgin and all the saints, do, do come back ! Signor Paolo is very angry because Signor Sandro told him that of course there could never be anything now between you and Lisa, since you had gone against the law. I would not tell you this to vex you, if you cared about Lisa ; but I know you did not think of her. If my being here was in the way of your coming back, I would go away, if it was to beg my bread. But you need not come here. You must go to Fano, and serve your time in the army. And when you come back, if it is a pain to you to see me here, I will go away, without asking leave of anybody. So do not let that prevent your coming back. Pray, pray do come ! For the love of Heaven do not make yourself a bandit, who can never come home, or be his father's heir, or settle in any way. I will not trouble you by writing anything about myself, for I know that I am now nothing to you. Do not suppose that I write this to induce you to think more kindly of me. I solemnly swear that it is not so ; and that I write only for your

own sake. I am very, very unhappy ; and have no thought about myself. I write to prevent you from ruining yourself entirely. For God's sake, for the sake of your father and mother, come back !

"I have written this in order to have it ready to send, if I can find out where you are, and can find the means of sending it. At this present time I do not know where you are, and there is nobody who will tell me.

"Your loving" (scratched out) "cousin,

"GIULIA."

The composition of this letter occupied Giulia the greatest part of the night ; and when she read it over, she was so dissatisfied with it that she would fain have essayed a second attempt ; but she had neither the time nor the paper. So she folded it, and fastened it with half a wafer picked out of the dust in the standish that held the Bella Luce inkstand, and secured it carefully within the lining of her stays ; to be always carried about with her, till some opportunity might offer itself of sending it.

It was fortunate that she had no longer deferred this precautionary measure ; for it so happened that the opportunity so long sought in vain, presented itself on the following day.

That day was to be spent at the *cura* ; and Giulia went thither early in the morning, as had formerly been her habit on such occasions. Don Evandro was absent in the church, saying his early mass, when she arrived ; but when on returning he passed through the kitchen to his study, and she stood up to salute him, he merely recognised her presence by a little nod, and passed on without speaking. As soon as he was in his study, Nunziata carried in to him his cup of black coffee and the little bit of dry toast that constituted his *colezione*, and then leaving Giulia some household task to do, and telling her that the priest was at his books, and would most likely not come out of his study any more before the *angelus*, went out into the village to get the profit of Giulia's assistance by indulging in a morning of gossip.

She had not been gone above half an hour, and Giulia was busy with the task that had been assigned to her in the kitchen, through which the only entrance into the *cura* opened, when a rough-looking young man, a stranger to Santa Lucia, dusty and evidently travel-worn, presented himself at the kitchen door and demanded to speak with the *curato*. Giulia asked him if she should tell the priest who it was that wanted him, for otherwise the priest would probably refuse to see him.

"Tell him," said the stranger, "that there is one from Piobico, who wants to speak with him."

Giulia did as was desired; and the "one from Piobico" was forthwith told to pass into the study.

There was nothing at all strange or remarkable in this. But—preoccupied as Giulia's head and imagination were with Beppo and his fortunes, and with the possibility of obtaining information as to his place of hiding, and persuaded, as she was, that the priest knew all about it—the possibility rushed into her mind, that this stranger, arriving from a distance, and having to all appearance been travelling all night, might be the bearer of communications between Don Evandro and Beppo. The more she dwelt on this possibility, while the man was in the priest's study, the more it seemed to grow into a probability. He came from Piobico. Giulia had heard of Piobico as a place "in the mountains." Beppo had "taken to the mountains!" At all events it was a possibility which she would not let slip; and she screwed up her courage, determined to try a bold stroke for the object she had in view.

She had about her all the little store of money she had received from *la Dossi*, less the price of the two sheets of paper. She took it out and looked at it. It was a large sum in Giulia's eyes;—far larger than she had ever before possessed. She divided it into two halves; and, putting back the one moiety into her pocket, kept the other in her hand, ready for the emergency to which she destined it.

Presently the stranger came out, and, with a nod to her, passed through the kitchen, and took his way, as

Giulia, looking after him, observed, not towards the village, but across the churchyard towards the old ruined tower. He was apparently about to return at once to Piobico without entering the village at all. Giulia let him go until he was nearly across the little churchyard; and then, with one sharp glance at the door of the study to see that it was shut and all still within it, she darted out of the kitchen, closing the door behind her, and overtook the traveller just as he reached the foot of the ruined tower.

"Young man!" she said, stepping round the base of the tower so as to place herself out of sight of the *cura*, or of anybody going to or from it, "you have come from Beppo Vanni in the hills to his reverence!"

"Yes, I have!" said the man, after staring at her in much surprise for a minute; "but I was to speak to no one on any account but the *curato* himself. And I thought——"

"Tell me where Beppo is hiding?" said Giulia, simply.

"Begging your pardon, Signora, that is just what I must *not* tell, seeing that you do not know it. If he is away in the hills, I suppose it is on purpose folks mayn't know where he is."

"Of course, he is hiding away from the government people! We all know that! But do you think I look like a government officer, or a spy either?"

"No, Signorina! I can't say I think you do!" said the young man, responding to her challenge by a sufficiently prolonged examination.

"I am a——friend of Beppo's," she said, affecting to hang down her head and look shy, on purpose to lead the messenger to form a very natural conclusion as to the nature of the interest she took in the fugitive, and of the message he was to be asked to take between them. "And look here," she continued, opening her hand, and showing a dollar and some small coins, "if you will tell me where he is, and take this letter to him, I will give you all this and as much more, if you will bring me back an answer from him."

"I would not tell any of them, that should not know, not for six times that money," said the man, looking at the coins in her hand; "but I suppose there can be no harm in telling such as you. You will tell no living soul?"

"Not a soul! I would not do him a mischief for all the world!" said Giulia, with no need of adding any affected earnestness to the asseveration.

"Well! he is with the friars at Santa Maria della Valle d'Abisso, in the mountain above Piobico. Give me the letter!"

"Here! There is no address on it; but it does not signify. You will give it into his own hand?"

"I will, before to-morrow night, never fear! But how am I to do about bringing you back his answer?"

"Look here!" said Giulia, after casting her eyes about a little; "put it into this hole, see, under this brick at the corner of the tower!"

"Ah! but how am I to get the money for bringing it?" said the man, with a shrewd grin.

"Oh, I will put the money in the same place," said Giulia, innocently. "You take out the money; and put the answer in its place."

"Well!" said the stranger, looking at her with great surprise. "I wonder whether all the Santa Lucia folks are as trusting as you are. It would not be difficult to steal your head off your shoulders! Why, Signorina, what is to hinder me from taking the money, and putting nothing in the place of it?"

"Oh! you would not cheat a poor girl in that way, I am sure! I am but a poor girl; and this money," said Giulia, taking out the remaining half, which she had reserved, is all I have in the world! See, I will leave it in the hole now. You may come back and rob me, if you will, as soon as my back is turned. But I am not afraid that you will do anything of the sort."

"Very good! I won't rob you, Signorina! I will bring you a letter,—that is, if Signor Beppo will give me one to bring. If not, I shan't come back for the

money. But it's no good your coming to look for it for the next four days. And it may be longer before I can return."

"Be as quick as you can ! See, there is the money ; it's quite safe in the hole. Good bye ! I must run back to the *cura* !"

And Giulia regained the kitchen before any one had become aware of her absence.

"Oh ! what a *benedizione della Santa Vergine* it was, that I wrote the letter last night !" thought she to herself. "Santa Maria della Valle d'Abisso, sopra Piobico !" she repeated to herself carefully ;—and said the words over and over again to herself at intervals during the remainder of the day.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SCREW.

THE day of the medical examination came and passed ; and, as we know, Beppo was among the defaulters. The number of these was very large ; and the government was strongly impressed with the absolute necessity of taking vigorous measures, not only to get possession of the men who were missing, but to check the practice of desertion. They were almost invariably the best men who had absconded. The town populations, though far less fitted for military service, were far less averse to it. The missing men were almost entirely the fine young *contadini* of the hills ;—the very flower of the population !

The authorities were exceedingly annoyed. Yet they were desirous of dealing as mercifully as possible with the defaulters. For it was well known that the parish priests were active in stimulating them to desertion ; and the influence of the clergy upon the rural populations was still very powerful.

One of the measures adopted for inducing the absentees to return, was the quartering of a few soldiers in the houses of their families, to be removed only when the

missing men should give themselves up. And in many instances this succeeded in producing the desired result. The maintenance of the soldiers caused an expense and annoyance which the families could ill endure. There were rarely wanting means of communication between the men absent in the hills and their friends at home; and thus the screw put on produced its effect.

"What an infamous shame it is!" said one of three or four military officers who were engaged in arranging the infliction of this penalty on the families of the recalcitrant and contumacious conscripts. "Look at this case now! Giuseppe Vanni, the eldest of two grown-up sons;—a remarkably fine young man;—noted to be of good character;—the father more than well-to-do! a rich man in his class! And this fellow goes off to the hills!—sacrifices everything rather than obey the law and serve his country! The old curmudgeon of a father won't even pay the cost of a substitute! Too disaffected for that, I suppose; as well as too stingy;—one or both! It is too bad!"

"Where is he from?" asked a superior officer.

"A village called Santa Lucia, out in the hills to the north-west," replied the first speaker, who had a variety of papers before him.

"Who is the parish priest?" asked the first.

"One Evandro Baluffi."

"Have you any note of him?"

"Yes! here we have his reverence!" replied the other, after referring to a list of names among the papers before him. "'The Reverend Evandro Baluffi; an active, intriguing, political priest, and determined adherent of the Papal government.'"

"Ay! that's where it is! It is useless trying to do anything with these poor ignorant *contadini*, as long as these fellows are allowed to poison their minds and sow disaffection! No good will be done till the government makes up its mind to lay a heavy hand on a few of these mischief-making fire-brands. Perhaps we may trounce the Reverend Evandro Baluffi yet. Meantime put a

heavyish party on the rick old farmer at Santa Lucia. If he is stingy, that may work !”

“I think I can tell you, Colonel, how to make that blister draw !” said a younger man, who had not yet spoken. “I happen to have picked up from a friend of mine a little bit of this Giuseppe Vanni’s history, which may, perhaps, be turned to good account. He is one of the finest young fellows in the country—over six feet in his stockings ;—a fellow we ought not to lose on any account. Well, it seems this young gentleman has a very handsome cousin, who was living here in service in Fano a week or two back, but is now gone home to the paternal farmhouse. And there seems to have been rather a warm flirtation between a corporal of ours, a man of the name of Tenda, and the pretty Giulia Vanni, to the infinite disgust and distress of her tall cousin, who, of course, is in love with *la bella* Giulia. Now, what do you say to sending Tenda with four or five men up to Santa Lucia ? If *that* don’t draw my gentleman, I think nothing will !”

There was a general laugh at the young captain’s plan of thus making the contumacious Beppo’s jealousy a screw which might prove to be irresistible, and sending the corporal on duty which would be most efficiently discharged by making assiduous love to a pretty girl.

“Upon my life, I think the notion is a very good one !” said the colonel. “It will serve him very right ; and, as you say, will bring him in if anything can. Let the lucky corporal be quartered on Signor Vanni, senior, by all means.”

So a little note was made on a big sheet of paper by the officer who had first spoken ; it was decided that this terrible screw should be put on poor Beppo ; and the military board passed on to the next case.

On the evening of the second day after the above little conversation had taken place, and the next after Giulia had spent her day at the *cure*, Corporal Tenda, with four men at his back, presented himself at Bella Luce, and exhibited to *la Santa* a laconic document, requiring, in

the name of the law, Paolo Vanni, cultivator and tenant at Bella Luce, in the commune of Santa Lucia, to house and maintain the five men named in it; and intimating that they would continue to be his guests till such time as his son, Giuseppe Vanni, duly drawn to serve in his Majesty's army, should be in the hands of the military authorities!

Poor Sunta had not the gift of reading; and, in no little terror, called Giulia down from up stairs to explain what might be the meaning of this invasion of Bella Luce by an armed force. For Signor Paolo and his son Carlo had not yet returned from the field.

The corporal had had the consideration to tell his men to remain outside at the front of the house, until he should have spoken with the inmates and explained to them the nature of their errand.

So, when Giulia came down at the call of *la padrona*, she found herself, it may be imagined with what astonishment, face to face with her rejected admirer!

But other feelings besides astonishment contributed to produce the vivid blush all over her face and neck, and the painful embarrassment which was evident in her manner. The mother had guessed at once that this unprecedented and alarming appearance of the *forza pubblica* had reference to the unhappy fugitive who was, she knew, absent in defiance of the law. She doubted not that the soldiers were come to take her son by force; and she derived some comfort from the thought that they would not find him. But Giulia may be forgiven if, seeing the corporal there alone bowing low before her, her first idea was that he had come there to urge his suit to herself. Then tumultuously rushed into her mind the horrid thought of the appearance this arrival of the corporal would wear in Beppo's eyes! What would he not think of her?

But the worthy little corporal did not leave her long in error.

"Do not, I beg of you, *stigmatissima* Signora Giulia,"—*most esteemed* Signora Giulia; not "*gentilissima*" or

"*bellissima*," as it used to be in the Palazzo Bollandini at Fano ; and Giulia marked and appreciated the change of style ;—"do not for a moment suppose, most esteemed Signora Giulia, that I am here to trouble you with any renewal of a subject that has been set at rest between us. You know my sentiments on the subject by means of my kind friend Captain Brilli,—*e basta !* I come here to-day in obedience to no wish of my own ; but in the execution of military duty. You will, I am sure, rightly appreciate my feelings, when I confess that, had my own wishes been consulted on the subject, I could have desired that the painful duty assigned to me had been entrusted to another. But duty is the soldier's religion, Signora ; and it only remains for me to discharge that duty as little painfully to you and this respectable family as is compatible with the orders I am bound to obey !"

"What is it all about ?" asked *la Sunta*, more utterly mystified than ever. "If they are come for Beppo, let them search the house, from garret to cellar ; and there is an end of it ! We know nothing about him, more's the pity !"

"But you have not stated, Signor Caporale, what the duty is which calls you here," said Giulia, somewhat tranquillised by the corporal's diffusive oratory.

"I have had the honour of presenting a billet to this excellent lady, whom I presume to be the mistress of the house, which indicates the nature of my business here. In a word, Signora Giulia, myself and four men—there they are outside there—are quartered here until such time as Signor Beppo may decide on returning and placing himself in conformity with the law."

"Quartered here ! in this house ! Five soldiers !" screamed *la padrona*, horrified and outraged to the utmost degree ! "And you are to stay here till Beppo gives himself up ! You may stay till you all lie in Santa Lucia churchyard, then ! But it is impossible ; it's unheard of !"

"You may guess, excellent Signora, that it is not a pleasant duty for a soldier to perform, to force himself as

an unwelcome guest, and make his presence a means of punishment. But orders must be obeyed. Duty admits of no refusal. It has been determined by the government to quarter soldiers on the families of the contumacious conscripts, as a means of inducing them to give themselves up. Permit me to assure you, Signora, that if I express the hope that Signor Beppo may be very shortly induced to do so, it is wholly in his own interest, and in nowise in my own, that I speak."

"But it is infamous! a robbery! a spoliation! We are poor people! We have no means of lodging five men, let alone keeping them! What will Paolo say, when he comes in?" stormed poor Sunta, as the whole extent of the infliction began to be comprehended by her.

"Signor Paolo will doubtless have the good sense, my dear Signora Vanni, to know that the law must be obeyed and that we are but the humble instruments of it! I am afraid, Signora Giulia, that it would be in keeping with the spirit of our orders to make our presence here as disagreeable in all ways as possible. But I trust that I may be able to contribute to the views of the government in a manner more consonant to my own feelings. My first duty, Signora Vanni, is to assure myself that the conscript, Giuseppe Vanni, is not concealed in this house or neighbourhood. But if the Signora Giulia, whom I have had the honour of meeting under other circumstances, will assure me that her cousin is not in the neighbourhood, no search could make me so certain of the fact as her word. If she cannot give me that word, she will say nothing, and leave us to perform our duty of searching."

"I can assure you most sincerely, Signor Caporale, that Beppo is nowhere in this neighbourhood. He is a long way off in the hills."

"That is quite sufficient, Signora! It would be useless to make any search."

Giulia, as soon as ever the foregoing words were out of her lips, bethought her that she was betraying to *la* Sunta more knowledge of Beppo's movements than she

could be supposed to possess, and she glanced sharply at the *padrona* to see if any such suspicion had been awakened in her mind. But *la Santa* considered it too much a matter of course to make any kind of denial to the ministers of the law, for any such thought to have entered her head.

"Giulia, child," she said, "just run down to the field and tell the *padrone* what has come upon us! I am sure I don't know what to do or to say!"

Giulia ran off, not sorry to escape from any further share in so disagreeable a scene; and the corporal, with many civil speeches to the old lady, caused his men to enter the kitchen, and seat themselves in a row on the bench outside the large table; so that when Giulia returned with the farmer, the latter, on entering his house, was confronted by the significant spectacle of five hungry men occupying the entire length of his supper-table.

Farmer Vanni fumed, and stormed, and raved; and the good-humoured corporal met all his ill-temper with the most imperturbable affability and good nature; for was this not Giulia's dwelling, and was she not there to suffer from the violence of any quarrel? So at last the five unwelcome guests sat down to the supper-table of their unwilling host, and beds, as well as the resources of the house allowed, were prepared for the men in the sort of outhouse beyond the kitchen, and for the corporal in the room above it.

And so matters continued for a few days, while old Paolo groaned in secret over the cost of keeping his unwelcome guests, and seasoned every mid-day and evening repast with invectives against the government, which practised such atrocities and extortions in the name of liberty. He had two or three private interviews with the priest during this time, going up to Santa Lucia for the purpose; for while the soldiers were at Bella Luce Don Evandro never once made his appearance there. Nor did the farmer let drop any word at home which could give the members of his family any information re-

specting the nature or subject of his communications with the priest.

The corporal and his men were very constantly absent from Bella Lucc, beating the country, and making inquiries in the hope of catching the fugitive, but always coming back to roost and to feed. Scarcely anything passed between the corporal and Giulia, for she lived as much up stairs as possible, and kept herself to the utmost of her power out of his way. And he, on the other hand, uniformly treated her with the most deferential respect, and made no attempt whatever to thrust his company upon her.

Nevertheless, she had an uncomfortable sense of being, however unobtrusively and undemonstratively, subjected to surveillance. She felt that her movements were watched. And she determined, therefore, to be very much on her guard in going up to the old tower above the church to look for the answer to her letter. It was the fifth day from that on which she had bribed the messenger, who had described himself as "one from Piobico," and had sent by him her letter to her cousin. He had spoken of being back with an answer on the fourth or fifth; and Giulia had counted the intervening days and hours with the utmost anxiety and impatience. Nevertheless, she had not dared to go to the tower for fear of the watching of the corporal and his men.

On the evening of the fifth day, having found it impossible to accomplish her object without the risk of detection from the vigilance of the soldiers at the farm, she asked old Sunta for permission to go and pay a visit to *la Nunziata*, intending to make an arrangement with her for passing the next day at the *cura*, and thinking that she should so withdraw herself from the watchfulness of the corporal, and easily find a moment during the day, when she might without any risk of detection flit across the churchyard, and see whether in the hole in the corner of the old tower there was any reply for her.

There was no difficulty in leading the priest's house-keeper to make the proposal her visitor desired ; and *la padrona*, when the request was made to her, had no objection to it. So, early the next morning, Giulia walked up to Santa Lucia, delighting herself with the thought that in the course of the day she should surely find an opportunity of getting her letter, if, indeed, Beppo had sent her one. But, to her great surprise and annoyance, a sudden sense of their religious duties appeared to have come upon two of Corporal Tenda's little company, and for the first time since they had been at Bella Luce, they felt the necessity of attending early mass at the parish church. And not only did they attend the early mass in the most exemplary manner, but they remained hanging about the church and the churchyard the whole of the day. Again and again Giulia looked out from the door of the priest's kitchen, and there always, either lounging about the gate which led from the churchyard to the village, or tranquilly smoking their cigars, reclining on the turf, or examining the appearance of the old tower with a newly awakened sense of its picturesque and antiquarian interest, were the two warriors of King Victor Emmanuel's army ; and there they remained all day, only returning to their supper at Bella Luce after Giulia, in despair of being able to achieve her object, had bidden *la Nunziata* good night, and started on her homeward walk.

It was clear that, without some very strong and decided measure, she would never be able to get unwatched to the old tower. But the longing within her to know whether Beppo had answered her or not was too strong to be put off. The only chance of paying a visit to the tower safely was at night. She could go, making all speed from Bella Luce, and be back in little more than an hour. There was little or no difficulty in getting out of the simply, and often, in summer, scarcely-fastened door of the farm-house. The soldiers would doubtless be as fast asleep as the members of the family ; and, in short, Giulia determined to make the venture that night.

So, about two hours after everybody had gone to bed, —about midnight, that is to say,—Giulia, who had not undressed herself, quietly stole down, and though rather startled at observing, as she passed through the kitchen, that the door of communication between it and the room in which the soldiers were sleeping was wide open, stepped lightly across the former room to the door of the house, opened it with as little noise as possible, and started on her errand, running along the well-known path as fast as her feet would carry her. She had not the slightest fear of any sort, except that of being seen by some one. None of those more imaginative terrors, which might have assailed an English girl bound on a similar expedition through two miles of country looking weird and strange in the moonlight, with a churchyard to cross at the end of it, had any influence over the imagination of the daughter of the Apennine. The southern mind is almost exclusively conversant with fancies and associations of a more material description, and rarely busies itself much with ghostly terrors.

Giulia sped along the path, stopping for a second or two now and then to listen if all was still around her—especially at the half-way tree,—crossed the churchyard, and made direct for the old tower just outside the further confines of it.

It was some little time before she could find the hole at the corner of the tower in which she had so confidently placed her money, and in which she hoped now to find a letter from Beppo. The spot agreed upon was at the back of the tower, if that side may be called so which was farthest from the church and village; for it was on that side that she and the “one from Piobico” had had their interview. But the moonlight, which was falling full on the other side of the ruin, had the effect of throwing the contrary side into double gloom, and seemed to confuse all the forms and relative positions of the objects.

However, after a little while she discovered the hole in the brickwork, thrust in her hand eagerly, and found that

the money was gone, and that there was a small slip of folded paper in its place !

Her first impulse was to thrust the paper into her bosom, and run home with it as fast as possible, keeping the perusal of it for the leisure and safety of her own room. But she remembered that she had no light at home ; that it would be difficult to procure one without running a risk of waking somebody, and thus leading to the detection of her escapade ; that it would be impossible for her to read her letter at home till the next day ; and that it would be dreadful to have to wait all that time before knowing what Beppo had written to her, in what mood he had received her letter, and in what tone replied to it.

She thought that the moonlight on the other side of the tower would suffice to enable her to read it, and, still breathless with her running and with her anxiety, she stepped round into the light, not looking up, but gazing on the precious bit of paper while, as she moved, she unfolded it in the full light of the moonbeam, and read easily enough, in Beppo's large coarse characters, the words, " On Sunday evening, two hours after the Ave Maria, I will be at the old tower where this is to be left, hoping to see there *one person only*." There was neither signature nor address ; but they were not at all necessary to the end in view.

Giulia, after the manner of peasants, who are unaccustomed to the process of reading with the eyes only, had read these words, not aloud, but a little above her breath, and with a thrill of delight at her heart was thrusting the precious paper into her bosom, and in the act of turning to make the best of her way back to Bella Luce, when she became aware of two figures standing immediately before her, and looking up with a scream recognised the same two soldiers who had been on the watch in the churchyard all day.

In the next instant she recovered sufficient presence of mind to say, though with a beating heart, and rather broken utterance :

"I did not know, Signori, that it was part of your duty to watch and molest a poor girl who might have her reasons for wishing to see somebody in private."

"It's no part of our duty, Signora, to give you any trouble or annoyance that we can any way avoid," answered one of the men, speaking in a very respectful manner; "but our business is to find the missing conscript if we can, by hook or by crook. And when my comrade heard the door of the house down yonder opened, he thought it best to see what was going on; and when he saw your ladyship starting off up the hill at that time of night, and all on the sly, he thought, and I thought too, when he waked me in a hurry, that it was likely enough you were after corresponding in some way or other with our man; so we just made free to follow you; and if so it was that you had any other matter in hand, why there was no harm done, for we should have known better than to blab; but as it is, you see, our duty will oblige us to be here at two hours after the Ave Maria on Sunday evening."

All the blood in Giulia's body seemed to rush with sudden violence to her heart, as these words smote her ear. She glared at the two men, as a mad momentary thought dashed into her brain, whether she could not spring at the throat of the speaker, and secure Beppo's safety by strangling the life out of him and his comrade on the spot; but in the next instant a full sense of her utter powerlessness came over her, and she threw herself on the ground, crying:

"Oh! Beppo! Beppo! And it is I who have destroyed him! And he will think that I have betrayed him!"

And then the horrible thought came to her mind that Beppo would suppose, not only that he was betrayed, but that he was betrayed by her connivance with the corporal, and that her passion for him had been the incitement to the base act. It was too dreadful! too cruel! she could not live to meet that day, and to face the look of Beppo's eye, when that conviction, as inevitably must be the case, should have reached his mind.

"*Oh! Santa Vergine dei sette dolori!* Mother of sorrows and of the sorrowing! Oh! let me die! let me die! I cannot bear it! I cannot bear it! Oh! Santissima Maria, have pity! take me away! take me to thee!"

And the poor girl writhed on the ground in the agony of her soul.

"But, Signora," said one of the soldiers who stood by, perfectly well understanding the whole force and pressure of the circumstances, and not a little distressed by the grief of the beautiful girl on the ground at their feet,— "there is no question of destroying your cousin. It's the best thing for him, any way. And, bless you, he'll find that out fast enough. By the time he has been six months in the ranks he'll thank you for being the means of putting him there, instead of being skulking and hiding about in the mountains like a wild beast."

"And as for betraying," added the other soldier, "there'll be no question at all of betraying. We shall report the thing to our corporal just as it is, and he'll let Signor Beppo know how it came about, and that you was in no way consenting to it."

"Oh, no, no, no! not the corporal,—not the corporal!" groaned Giulia, without any clear idea, save that no good, and nothing but sorrow and misery, could arise from any meeting between Beppo and Tenda.

"Well, Signora," said one of the men, "the corporal will know best how to manage. We must report to him."

"And we have no call," added the other, "to say anything to anybody else whatsoever. And, Signora, we are not the men to do it; so you had better make haste home and slip quietly to bed. You have no need to fasten the door; we shall come down the hill at leisure, and we will fasten it; and if anybody hears it, why, we have been out patrolling; and that is all about it."

Giulia had sufficient consciousness of her present position to be aware that what the soldier said was true and considerate. But she felt too bitterly the anguish they were causing her, and looked upon them too much as Beppo's enemies, for it to be possible to her to enter

into amicable communication with them. She got up from the ground, therefore, without any assistance from either of the men ; for with the instinctive delicacy and appreciation of the æsthetics of the situation which is so characteristic of Italians, they did not put out a hand to touch her ; and merely saying "I will go home," turned to walk down the hill, with, perhaps, at that instant, the sorest and heaviest heart in all Italy, lying like a lump of ice in her bosom.

BOOK IV.

AT THE PASSO DI FURLO.

CHAPTER I.

GIULIA'S NIGHT JOURNEY.

GIULIA walked down the well-known path to Bella Luce; she passed the half-way tree in perfect safety,—for there was no Beppo in the path to stop her passage now!—and slunk up stairs into her little chamber, undressed herself and got into bed; and the next morning, not having closed an eye during the intervening hours, she rose at the usual hour, and set to work on her wonted employment. But her mind rendered no account to itself of her occupation in all these things. She was only conscious of moving to and fro under such an overwhelming pressure of calamity and grief as seemed to have stunned her. She had betrayed Beppo to his enemies, and had done so under circumstances which must lead him to attribute her conduct to motives that it was agony to her to contemplate. Death appeared to her to be the only possible escape from a situation too dreadful to be borne. And, oh! how happily, how gratefully would she have closed her eyes with the knowledge that she should never

open them more! If only Beppo could have been made to know that she had died to make it evident to him that he had been everything to her, and Corporal Tenda nothing, with what joy and gladness would she have met death!

But for all this it never entered into her head to commit suicide. With a quarter of the strength of despair and amount of motive to actuate her, a French girl would have taken her pan of charcoal as naturally and unhesitatingly as an Italian girl kneels to the Madonna! Under a less amount of misery many an English girl has taken the fatal leap from the bridge parapet into the darksome pool below! And yet the mind of the English girl has been used to dwell on thoughts of the invisible, on fears and awful doubts respecting that unknown world, to which she rushes in her hopelessness, which have never been present to the mind of the Italian. And it was not high religious principle, or even overpowering religious fear, that prevented Giulia from turning her thoughts towards suicide. She was religiously ignorant, to a degree scarcely credible even to those most acquainted with our own uneducated classes. And though her Church deems self murder as one, at least, of the most irremediable of sins, she had received no teaching upon that subject. And in truth, an Italian pastor might be excused for thinking that to preach against suicide was not one of the most necessary parts of his duty. No! it was not religious principle which prevented Giulia from even turning her thoughts towards that most desperate of all remedies for human sorrows. It was because it was not in her nature to do so. It never occurred to her among the possibilities of the case.

Italians very rarely commit suicide. Of the rustic population of the fields, it may probably be said that they never do so! Such a case is hardly upon record. So true it is that human conduct in such matters is ruled more by hereditary tendency and the natural idiosyncrasies of race, than by any other order of causes.

It was the morning after her unfortunate expedition to

the old tower at Santa Lucia, about ten o'clock in the forenoon; the farmer and his son were in the fields, and *la padrona* was engaged in household affairs up stairs. Giulia was busy in the kitchen, mechanically going through her accustomed round of little duties, when Corporal Tenda came into the room. It was the first time that Giulia and he had been alone together since he had been at Bella Luce. For it had been the object of both of them to avoid such meetings.

"You will excuse me, I hope, for intruding on you, Signora," said the corporal, saluting her very gravely, and with the same military flourish of the arm, that he would have used to the colonel of the regiment; "you will do me the justice to admit that since I have been here I have not yielded to the temptation of conversing with you."

"You have been very kind, Signor Caporale," said Giulia, sighing deeply, "but everything is against me; and now . . ."

"Pardon me for interrupting you, Signora, and permit me to say a few words to you. Captain Brilli, I believe, explained to you the nature of my feelings on learning that the happiness I had been presumptuous enough to hope for was out of my reach. He made you understand, I hope, that your happiness is the first consideration I have in the world; and that if, as it seems, that can be promoted only by aiming at the welfare of your cousin, then the welfare of your cousin becomes a matter of paramount interest to me."

"Indeed, indeed, Signor Caporale, I am very grateful to you; but . . ."

"If you will forgive me for again interrupting you, Signora, and will condescend to listen to what I have to say, I shall the sooner be able to disembarass you of my presence. I say that I am very desirous for the welfare of Signor Beppo. It was with that view that I begged Captain Brilli to open your eyes to the real nature of his position as a deserter. If you had any doubt about the correctness of that information, neither you nor anyone

else can have any doubts upon the subject any longer. For the proclamations stating all the liabilities and the penalties are now out, and are posted all over the country. There is a copy on the door of the court-house up at Santa Lucia. It is perfectly clear that there is no way of avoiding absolute ruin and destruction except timely submission. Even if he could hope permanently to elude the pursuit of the troops and the police, what sort of a life is that of a bandit?—and for such a man as Signor Beppo! Be sure, therefore, that the chance which has led to the certainty of his capture, when he comes up to the tower yonder, is the best thing that could happen to him. Not the best thing, however. For the best thing would be that he should surrender voluntarily. And I had hoped that you might possibly have induced him to do so!”

“But I intended to try hard to do so! I did writo to him, Signor Caporale, begging him all I could to come back. I should have said everything I could think of to make him come in, when I saw him at the tower. Oh! Signor Caporale; why not let me try? Why not let me meet him?” said Giulia, clasping her hands as a sudden ray of hope darted into her mind; “why not let me meet him alone, and try to persuade him?”

“It would be against orders, against duty Signora! I would not do it to save my neck from the halter. But I am not sure. not sure,” he added, looking into her tearful eyes, “that I should not do it to merit your gratitude, if it had been possible! Happily for me, it is not possible. You forget, Signora, that it was not I who discovered the secret of your appointment with Signor Beppo, but two of my men. Even if I were to be willing to commit this breach of duty, I could not; for the men know as well as I that it is our duty to take the defaulter at all hazards, and by every means. Signor Beppo must be taken on Sunday evening;—there is no help for it. My business was only to point out for your consolation, that it is in truth the best thing that could happen to him; and just to say that you may depend on me to make

it clear to him that his capture is not due to any betrayal of him in any way."

"Beppo will never, never believe it; he thinks——" but there was some feeling at Giulia's heart, sore and bleeding as it was, that prevented her from going on to demonstrate what it was that Beppo thought which would make him proof against the corporal's eloquence.

"I hope he will be more reasonable," said the corporal. "And now, Signora, I must bid you farewell. I little thought when I last did so, that I should see you again here, and under such circumstances. I shall not intrude upon your privacy again; and besides, you are aware, of course, that the capture of your cousin puts an end to our unwelcome stay here. It will be our duty to march with him at once that same evening to Fano. May the time come, Signora, when we may meet hereafter under happier circumstances! Addio, Signora!"

"Addio, Signor Caporale! I am grateful to you for much kindness!"

"Farewell, Signora Giulia," said the corporal, in the act of leaving the kitchen.

"Oh, Signor Caporale," said Giulia, suddenly calling after him; "will anything very bad be done to Beppo for going away?"

"Oh, no! They don't want to be severe with the men. They know, between ourselves, Signora," he continued, dropping his voice as he spoke, with the true Italian feeling that he was approaching a dangerous subject, "they know that it is the priests that are really to blame more than the poor fellows who take to the hills. No! they won't do much. Only let him buckle to with a good will, and make a good soldier, and all will soon be forgotten, and he will be made a corporal in no time. And you won't like him any the worse when he comes back a smart soldier, Signora Giulia!" said the corporal, with a somewhat rueful smile; "I shall tell him that, Signora! Good-bye!"

"No! no! you must not tell him that—at least not from me," said Giulia, very cagerly, but the corporal was

already gone. And it may be doubted whether she was very anxious to prevent the little man from using any means that such a consideration might supply towards reconciling Beppo to his fate—if it must indeed come to be his fate.

But there were yet two nights and two days before that fate was to be consummated in the manner Corporal Tenda and his men contemplated. It was a Friday on which the above conversation had taken place. There was, therefore, the Friday night, all the day of Saturday, the Saturday night, and the whole of the day on Sunday, before the time fixed for his coming to the tryst at the old tower.

And during all this time Giulia had to meditate upon the coming catastrophe! It was in vain that she persuaded herself of the truth of the corporal's representations, that to be captured and taken off by force to serve his time in the army was all for his advantage. Giulia, if not altogether imbued herself with the genuine *contadino* horror for the service,—for her views and feelings had been a good deal modified and enlarged in this respect by her residence in the city and by her association there with military men, and by the conversations which she had sometimes partaken in, but had oftener listened to, —nevertheless, was quite *contadina* enough to be well aware of the feeling with which Beppo, like all his class, regarded service in the army. Then again, she put very little faith in the good result of any of those promised representations of the corporal, to the effect that the capture was effected by no fault or participation of hers. She knew well what Beppo's first feeling on the subject would be! She was too well aware how all that he had seen in Fano would appear to his mind to be confirmation strong as Holy Writ of all his new suspicions. She pictured to herself the bitter scorn with which he would listen to assurances, which would have the effect to him of having been concerted between her and her lover, for the purpose of blinding and making a fool of him. She saw but too clearly how the circumstances of the matter

must appear to him, how they would carry with them all the weight and authority of indubitable facts, while the explanations which were to follow them would come halting after with the weakness of mere excuses. And bearing in mind, too, Beppo's natural feeling towards the person who was to be the bearer of those excuses, she dared not flatter herself that any good could come of them. In short, by the time she had spent most part of the ensuing night—the Friday night, that is—in meditating on the matter in the silence of the night hours, the result was, that any good effect which the representations of the corporal might have had on her mind at the moment, was altogether obliterated.

And during the whole of that day, the Saturday, the hourly drawing near of the consummation which was for evermore to brand her as false beyond all precedent of falseness, infamous beyond all imagined infamy, was never for a moment absent from her mind. But by the time the Ave Maria had come, she had determined on a course of action.

It was very doubtful whether the effort she purposed making would be of any avail; but at least her intention involved self-sacrifice; and action, with however desperate a hope, was preferable to hopeless, agonised waiting in inaction for the catastrophe.

The night came. The farmer and Carlo came home to their supper; but there were only three of the soldiers to sup with them. Giulia had not seen the corporal since her conversation with him in the morning. And now he and one of the men were absent at the supper-time. But there was nothing unusual in this. Two, or more, of the party were often absent, sometimes all night, patrolling the neighbourhood, or marching hither and thither in obedience to information furnished them—in all probability intentionally false information in the majority of cases—of the whereabouts of some one or other of the contumacious conscripts.

As soon as the supper was over the soldiers went to their sleeping quarters in the room by the side of the

kitchen ; and very soon afterwards the members of the family went also to their chambers. Giulia also went to hers, and bolted the door of it as soon as she had entered. Then after making one or two small changes in her dress, and securing a small supply of bread, which she had previously carried to her room, in a handkerchief, knotted so as to serve the purpose of a wallet, she stepped to the window, and after straining her eyes into the night to see, and her ears to hear, whether all was quiet, she placed a chair by the side of the window-sill, and by its help stepped with a light and unhesitating foot on to a ladder, which, a few minutes before supper, she had secretly carried round to the back of the house, on which the window of her room opened.

The last time she had secretly left the house her motions had been spied, in consequence of her passing to the kitchen-door by the door of the chamber in which the soldiers were sleeping. This time she was determined to avoid that danger.

She descended the ladder swiftly and surely ;—the height was not great ;—and on reaching the ground, she started, without losing a moment in any further listenings on the path which led to the village.

And what was the purpose of her night-tide expedition this time ? It was simply to undo the mischief she had so unwillingly done, by preventing Beppo from coming to the trysting-place, where capture awaited him. It was but a slender hope she had of being able to effect her purpose. She knew nothing of the locality of the place where he was hiding. She had never before in her life heard of *Santa Maria della Valle d'Abisso*. But the messenger had said that he came from Piobico. It was probable, therefore, that Beppo would be coming from that direction. And she had a general idea of the whereabouts of Piobico. It so happened that she knew one must go by the Passo del Furlo to go to Piobico. And she had once been through the Furlo pass, and knew the way to it. She must go by the little paved lanes among the hills at the back of the village into the valley of the

Metauro; and then she had only to follow the high road, through Fossombrone, and then away, away many a mile, but always by the high road. So that, once in the great valley of the river, there was no danger of missing her road. And when she was at a distance from home, there would be no difficulty in asking the way to Piobico.

But Giulia's calculation was, that she should not be obliged to go all the way to the place of Beppo's retreat. He was to reach the old tower at the back of the churchyard a couple of hours after the Ave Maria on the Sunday evening—about twenty hours, that is to say, or a little more, from the time of her departure from Bella Luce. She hoped, therefore, that at the end of about ten hours' walk, early on the Sunday morning, she should meet him on his road, and so give him ample warning of his danger. Then, indeed, she would urge on him all that the corporal had said; and if possible, induce him to surrender himself voluntarily to the authorities at Fano. The corporal himself had said that that would be the best thing for him of all.

It never entered, it will be observed, into Giulia's calculations, that a person coming from Piobico to Santa Lucia might travel by any other route than the high road! Poor Giulia! She had always heard all her life, that when people wanted to go to any place, they went along the road till they came to it, and no other possible course of proceeding presented itself to her imagination. She purposed going through the pass of Furlo, which was the part of the road she best remembered,—very naturally, for it is a very remarkable place. But we know that the priest had especially cautioned Beppo not to pass on any occasion by that route.

Giulia sped along the path to the village, with her wallet of bread slung behind her shoulders, a precaution which was rendered necessary by her absolute lack of money, the entirety of her moneyed possessions having been, as we saw, expended on the messenger who had brought the letter that had caused so much trouble.

She sped along the path, reached the village, where all

the population had gone to bed two hours or more ago ; reached the *cura*, at the windows of which she glanced suspiciously, but there was no light in them ; reached the church, and the churchyard behind it, and the foot of the old ruined tower by which the road passed that was to take her down through one or two other villages into the valley of the Metauro.

She had looked at the *cura* suspiciously as she passed ; but she cast no glance of doubt or misgiving on the old half-ruined brick tower. Nobody lived in that save the owls up in the ivy that clustered around its top.

Nevertheless, there were two shrewd eyes, which belonged to no such biped, looking out from that ivy at her as she passed.

CHAPTER II.

THE TWO OUTLAWS.

THE "one from Piobico," who took Giulia's letter to Beppo, had also taken back with him one from the priest, in answer to the communication he had brought from the fugitive. The purpose of Beppo's letter to the priest was to inquire whether any and what measures were being taken by the authorities to obtain possession of the contumacious men; and to ask when it was probable that he would be able to return to Bella Luce. And the answer to this application by the priest contained statements directly opposed to those of Giulia's letter. She assured him that there would be no coming back save after making submission, and undergoing the appointed time of service; that there was no alternative between this and the indefinitely prolonged life of an outlaw and bandit. The priest, on the contrary, repeated his former assertions, that shortly,—not quite yet, but very soon,—the soldiers would have left the country, the whole matter would have blown over, and he would be able to return freely.

Of these so diametrically opposed accounts, Beppo was

not unnaturally disposed to credit that of the priest. He spoke with authority; it was to be supposed that he must know what he was talking about,—he was the priest. Nothing was more likely, on the other hand, than that Giulia should have been mistaken, and especially, if it was to be supposed, as too probably he must suppose, that her information on the subject was obtained from the military. Why, of course they would say that every kind of infamy and destruction would fall on those who declined to enter their ranks. The perusal of her letter, therefore, did not accomplish anything towards the object Giulia had so earnestly in view when writing it. It did not in any degree succeed in persuading Beppo to return, and put himself on good terms with the law.

But it did produce a great effect upon him. He questioned and cross-questioned the messenger respecting every particular of his interview with Giulia, and was very much affected by the account of the expenditure of her entire money means upon the despatch of the letter. This involved an argument of earnestness and sincerity which very speakingly appealed to the *contadino* mind. Then the messenger related to him, how the lady had, though very shy and modest about it, admitted to him that she was a particular friend of his, and how, when he (the messenger) had cautioned her about not revealing to any one the place of Beppo's retreat, she had said, "she would not do him any injury for all the world."

Beppo insisted again and again on having the very words she had used repeated to him, and meditated on the exact and precise signification of every word with a patience and minuteness of examination which would have done honour to a learned German commentator. He was moved to tears by the relation of how she had declared that the reserved half of the sum of *la Dossi's* wages was "all the money she had in the world;" and how she had been willing to risk putting that all into a hole in a wall, whence it might with the greatest ease have been stolen, for the sake of having a letter from

him. These were proofs of interest which it was impossible to doubt.

But then his mind went back to that last horrible time of seeing her in the street of Fano with Lisa, when he had accused her to her face of her falseness and faithlessness, and she had stood by uttering no word in her justification, and to all appearance caring nothing about either him or his accusations. And then again, that terrible and never-to-be-forgotten day in the Palazzo Bollandini at Fano, when he had seen her and that infamous man together, when they had paraded their intimacy before him, and joined in throwing ridicule upon him,—her relative and life-long friend, at least, if nothing else.

What was he to think? what to believe? Amid these distracting and insoluble doubts one thing only was clear to him, that he would give anything in the world to see her once more. It seemed to him as if he would then be able at once to blow aside all these contradictions and obscurities, and ascertain the truth if he could but see her.

So he had written the words which we know that Giulia had duly though so unfortunately found in the appointed hiding-place, and had determined at all hazards to have a meeting with her. His purpose was to start on the Saturday morning, follow the same route across the mountains which he had travelled in coming to his place of refuge, and so arrive at the ruined tower behind the churchyard on the Sunday evening.

But a circumstance occurred which had the effect of changing his plans.

It has been mentioned that one other man from Santa Lucia besides himself had drawn a bad number, and that Don Evandro had succeeded in inducing him also to take to the hills; though he had not seen fit to join him to Beppo in the arrangements he had made for the safety of the latter.

This man, who had no very evident or assured means of subsistence, except such as he could obtain from his

own family, or from the charity of the inhabitants of his own village, had, though absenting himself from his home, been lurking in the neighbourhood of Santa Lucia ; and continued to do so till the arrival of Corporal Tenda and his men at Bella Luce made it too dangerous for him to remain so near at hand any longer. Don Evandro, however, in insisting on the man's departure from a district where he would be sure to be captured, found it impossible to send him into one where, as he said, he should be sure to be starved, without some assurance that such a fate should not happen to him. He had accordingly given him a letter to a brother priest who held a small benefice in an out-of-the-way part of the country above the little hill town of Cagli, which is situated near the eastern extremity of that wild district called Monte Nerone, under the northern slopes of which stood the obscure little monastery in which Beppo had found an asylum.

The correspondent to whom Don Evandro had written, was requested by him not to give an asylum to the poor fugitive ; for it has been stated, that he was not a man on whom much dependence could be placed in any way, but simply not to let him starve. Being thus supplied with the means of keeping body and soul together, and at the same time warned that he must not remain in the village, nor among the neighbouring farms, he wandered up to the solitary moorlands of Monte Nerone, and intending to descend in the direction of Cagli, missed his way, and came down upon the valley in which the monastery of Santa Maria della Valle di Abisso is ensconced.

It so happened that Beppo, dreadfully hard pressed to get through the days of enforced idleness in the society of the half-dozen friars, his hosts, had rambled up the hill to the ruined castle which has been mentioned, when the reader was first introduced to the singularly sombre little Valle di Abisso ; and there he and his fellow fugitive from Santa Lucia fell in with each other, on the Friday before the Saturday on which he was to start for Santa Lucia.

This man had never been even an acquaintance of Beppo at home, further than as the members of such little communities are all known to each other. But on the same principle as that by virtue of which misfortune is said to make a man accustomed to strange bedfellows, the two Santa Lucia fugitives met as fellows.

"These old stones would make a famous hiding-place," said the stranger, after the two men had expressed their surprise at the unexpected meeting, and detailed the separate histories of their flight; "and for what I can see, it is like to come to that before long!"

"Before long I hope to be at home again at Bella Luce!" said Beppo.

"What, by paying?" said the other; "yes, that's all very well for the like of you!"

"No, my father does not think it right to pay for a substitute—the Santa Lucia man, who knew old Farmer Paolo, grinned—but the search for the missing men will soon be over!"

"Soon be over! Who told you that?"

"Why his reverence the Curato, to be sure! Did he not tell you the same?"

"Ay! but one thing is certain; either he knew nothing about it, or else he chose to say one thing when he knew another. No, Signor Beppo, you won't go home again by reason of the search being over!"

"Why, what do you know about it, I should like to know?—you to know better than his reverence!"

"Not I only. Any man may know better now, who can read. There are the papers stuck up all over the country."

"What papers? What do you mean, Niccoló?"

That was the stranger's name.

"What do I mean? Why, haven't you seen any of them—the proclamation papers? Why, you can't go into a village, nor to a house scarcely, where they are not stuck up. The men who have gone out are to be just the same as bandits and brigands. They lose all civil rights. They are to be hunted through the country till found.

And there is a certain time allowed for giving themselves up. No, no, Signor Beppo, there's no going home again!"

A cold perspiration settled on Beppo's brow as he heard him. He had never supposed that he was making himself a criminal and infamous in the eye of the civil law, or that the consequences of his escape would be other than temporary. Giulia's information was correct, then! There was abundant reason in all she had said to urge him to return. Let her information come from what source it might, it seemed evidently to be given him with a view to his advantage. And yet the last communication from Don Evandro, brought back by the messenger who had carried Giulia's letter, had still urged him to remain in concealment at Santa Maria della Valle di Abisso, and had still represented his exile from home as merely temporary. Yet, surely, if he had no other means of knowing the truth, the priest must have seen these proclamations!

"If these papers are stuck up everywhere," said Beppo, as these thoughts passed through his mind, "I suppose there must be some at Santa Lucia, as well as everywhere else?"

"*Altro!* There's more than one of them there! They were stuck up before the soldiers came. I saw 'em myself; for I was there after they came, till his reverence told me that if I showed my face at Santa Lucia again as long as the soldiers were there, he would give me up!"

"Soldiers at Santa Lucia!" said Beppo, in consternation.

"What, don't you know? Is it possible? No, the soldiers are not at Santa Lucia;—not in the village at least;—for they are at Bella Luce!"

"What!" cried Beppo, looking as if the speaker had given him a violent blow. "What do you say? Soldiers at Bella Luce? Soldiers in my father's house? You must be dreaming,—or joking!"

"Not a bit one more than the other, Signor Beppo," returned Niccoló; "and it's no matter for joking either.

Yes, in your father's house! A corporal and four men, to lodge and feed! They say old Signor Paolo is half out of his mind about it, and no wonder!"

"In the house!" exclaimed Beppo, to whom the idea seemed yet too monstrous to be realisable or credible.

"Yes, living and sleeping in the house! that's one of the ways they've got to drive the men to come in and give themselves up, you see. If you don't come, say they, we put so many soldiers on you to eat your family out of house and home till you do, says they. That's their dodge."

"How many men did you say there are at Bella Luce?" asked Beppo.

"There's a corporal of Bersaglieri and four men," said Niccoló; "I saw 'em. They little thought as they were going up the hill to Bella Luce, that one of the men they wanted was looking at 'em, not three yards off, from behind your father's barn."

"A corporal of Bersaglieri!" said Beppo, while a vague idea of the possibility that it might be *the* corporal, sent all the blood in his body to his head.

"Yes; a corporal of Bersaglieri, a smart, active-looking little chap. They are most of them little bits of men, I marked," said the large-limbed Romagnole. "I heard his name in the village afterwards. They called him Corporal Tenda."

Beppo was struck absolutely speechless. He stood staring at the man with distended eyes and open mouth, struggling for breath to speak.

"That man at Bella Luce!" he said, in a voice so changed that Niccoló stared at him with surprise. "Living in the house! Corporal Tenda living in my father's house! And Giu—! Not Corporal Tenda!"

"Yes, Corporal Tenda! I remember the queer, outlandish-sounding name well enough. Why not Corporal Tenda? What matters one more than another? He don't eat more than another man."

But Beppo had thrown himself on the ground, and was sitting, holding his forehead in his hands, and swaying

his body to and fro as if he was in violent bodily pain.

"Ah! I see," said Niccoló, after staring at him in much surprise for a while; I see where it is, now! Yes, I remember. I did hear some talk in the village, that that corporal chap was the man that had been making up to the Signora Giulia, and that she was so sweet upon, down in the city. Yes, yes! I understand it all now. Yes; that's a very nasty pinch, it must be owned. They've got the halter on your throttle there, Signor Beppo, sure enough!"

But Beppo could only answer by groaning aloud, as he still sat swaying himself in the intensity of his agony.

An Italian does not conceive that there is anything ridiculous in suffering caused by unfortunate or unrequited love, or that it becomes him in any way to disavow or conceal the fact. Niccoló was not a particularly sympathetic individual, nor had he any special regard or liking for Beppo Vanni; but he pitied him for the pain he was undergoing, as naturally as he would have pitied him if he had been suffering from the toothache. One agony seemed to him just as real and as pitiable as the other.

"It is a very hard case; a veritable *maledizione del cielo*, Signor Beppo! that must be admitted," he said, in a sympathising voice. "What shall you do? I think that such a chance would drive me home all hazards."

"It will do just the contrary to me," said Beppo, getting up, and looking as if the blow he had suffered had done the work of a long illness on his features. "I had meant to go to Santa Lucia to-morrow; but there is nothing there now that I care to see, or ever shall care to see again."

"What shall you do, then, Signor Beppo?" said Niccoló.

"I don't know; I don't care. I don't care what becomes of me! Give myself up, perhaps. Good-bye, Niccoló! I'm glad I chanced to meet you. I'm glad to have learned the truth. Good-bye!"

And so saying he turned on his heel, and began going down among the woods towards the monastery, leaving Niccoló gazing after him.

And that was how it came to pass that Beppo did not start for Bella Lucc as he had intended on the Saturday morning.

CHAPTER III.

THE FURLO PASS.

BEPP0 made his way slowly down through the thick wood, towards the monastery, heedless of his steps, and heedless of everything save the dull dead sense of overwhelming misery, which made everything else indifferent to him. Thus descending the steep hill-side, mainly because it was mechanically easier than to ascend, he came to the top of the precipice, immediately overhanging the buildings of the monastery, and had nearly fallen over. But he saved himself with the instinct of self-preservation, by catching hold of the slender stem of a young chestnut; and smiling bitterly the next moment at the thought that it would have been better for him to have fallen, he made his way down to the spot where the wall of rock, which hedged round the little territory of the friars, completing its semicircle, fell to the brink of the stream. There, at the extreme verge of the damp and mournful-looking meadow, he seated himself on the trunk of a fallen tree, and set to work, if possible, to think.

Since receiving that letter from Giulia he had been suffering hope once more to grow up in his heart; fool,

miserable fool that he was. Of course it was all arranged. They had procured, no doubt by the influence of that Captain Brilli, that the corporal should be sent to Bella Luce. There was no talk of soldiers coming to Bella Luce till after Giulia had returned to it. And he—oh ! three-fold ass and dupe that he was—he had laboured and planned to procure her return thither. And this anxiety to induce him to give himself up ? No doubt it was plotted between her and the military authorities ;—he was to be the price, very likely, of permission for the corporal to marry her. To be sure ; the thing was clear. He had been told enough of the efforts that the officers who had the management of the conscription were making to get the men, especially the more desirable materials for soldiers, by hook or by crook ! Yes, it was as clear as daylight. If you can induce him to deliver himself up there shall be a permission, very sparingly granted in the Italian army, for the corporal of Bersaglieri to marry.

Give himself up ! Perhaps it was the best thing he could do. Go for a soldier and find a soldier's death. But he would not be the price paid for the success of her shameless, scandalous inconstancy and falsehood. No ! He would go direct to Fano. He would never return to Bella Luce again. He would go and make his submission to the superior authorities, and take care that it was known that his worthless cousin had nothing to do in the matter.

And then the evening breeze brought to his ears the sound of the friars in the neighbouring little chapel, bawling their vesper psalms. And he thought that he could find it in his heart to take his place among them, gird the cord around his loins, and never go out of this darksome valley more. They were racked by no pangs of unrequited love, of that most miserable and most hopeless of all loves, the love which has been given, alas ! all too irrevocably, to a heartless and unworthy woman !

He dragged himself, when the shutting-up hour came, to the miserable little dilapidated cell which had been

assigned to him, and the night passed in going again and again over the same round of wretchedness. Then came the necessity of meeting another day, of facing the sunlight, so gladdening and glorious for the light of heart, so flouthingly garish and insulting to those that mourn.

But as the sun rose high into the heaven, and the strong fierce light was poured over all things, a certain change began to be operated in the tone of his feelings. A fierce and burning indignation at the wickedness of which he had been the victim, began to take the ascendant over the less self-asserting attitude of mind that, during the hours of darkness, had prompted him to desire only annihilation of self-consciousness,—only to slink away into some unseen corner like a stricken stag,—to forget everything and be forgotten.

No! it was not just; it was not righteous. Infamy and falsehood should not have their triumph, at least, without having heard once the truth. The words of indignant reproof, of withering scorn, of most just denunciation, were burning on his tongue. He felt that he must speak them! Once, only once, before he should go away, his eyes never more to look on her, nor hers on him, once yet again he must speak! She could not fail to feel in some measure the infinite depth of infamy to which she had fallen, as he felt he could speak it to her; she could not but cower before his righteous scorn.

“Yes! he would go. He would speak those rightful words, and then . . .!”

But it was not quickly, as it has been related here, that his mind came to this point. Gradually, as he kept heaping coals of fire on his indignation, by feeding his imagination with fresh pictures of Giulia’s falseness,—of her hideous fickleness to him, and, yet more maddening, of her happy loves with another,—gradually his fury came to that white heat at which speech became an imperious necessity to him.

But by that time the day was waning. Little more than twenty-four hours remained before the time he had named for the meeting at the foot of the ruined tower by

the churchyard; very little more than twenty-four hours! and in that time, let him make what speed he would, let hot indignation goad him as it might, he knew that it was impossible for him to reach the trysting-place by the hour named, if he were to travel by the path over the mountains.

It was still possible, however, to do it if he travelled by the direct road through the Furlo pass, instead of making that large circuit. It was true that the priest had enjoined him by no means to use that route upon any occasion. But the desire that had come upon him of keeping the tryst he had made at the ruined tower, and there once for all pouring out all the pent-up grief and rage that were in his heart, was too strong to admit of being frustrated by such a difficulty. And, besides, as to the chances of capture by the patrolling parties of soldiers, he was quite reckless.

So it came to pass that Beppo was starting from Santa Maria della Valle di Abisso a few hours only sooner than Giulia was setting out from Bella Luce; and that he also was intending to travel by the Furlo pass.

He had none of the difficulties to meet and precautions to take, which had been necessary to Giulia in starting on her expedition. But he thought it due to his hosts to tell them that he should not be at the monastery that night, for that he purposed making an excursion to see how matters were going on—whether there were any parties of military in the neighbourhood, or any reason to fear that Santa Maria della Valle might be visited by them.

The Superior, when he mentioned his purpose, sought to deter him from it,—pointing out that it was incurring a risk for nothing,—that any such information that he required might be much more easily and safely obtained by one of the brotherhood than by him.

“Brother Simone is going on circuit to-morrow morning, my son,” said the Superior; “he is a discreet and prudent man, and not without intelligence in the affairs of the world. Let him make the inquiries you

wish. He would be able to do it without incurring any suspicion. And I have very little doubt that he could obtain a copy of the proclamation you are so desirous of seeing and bring it home with him."

"I think, father, that I should prefer ascertaining the state of things myself. I will be very cautious. And something prompts me to go out to-night. I cannot rest in peace here till to-morrow morning."

"Not till to-morrow morning, my son! Not one night! What would it be if you had to remain here, without prospect of change, every night and every morning till the sun set behind yon mountain for the last time that your eyes were ever to see it? The truth is, that the still convent life has in these few days been so heavy to you, that from sheer restlessness you must needs go forth into the world! Well, go, my son! Should anything unfortunate occur, you will have the justice to let his reverence the curato of Santa Lucia know that we were not to blame in the matter!"

"Assuredly, father. Trust me, no blame shall rest upon you for my fault. But I do not think that I am going into any danger."

"Nevertheless, my son, it is well to be prepared against it. And by a strange chance it so happens that I am able to give you the means of being so. We are men of peace here, and have no arms of offence, or even of defence! But I will give you a lieue, which you shall give in passing to a worthy man at Piobico, who will furnish you with the means of keeping violence at a distance."

The Superior stepped into his cell, and in a minute or two came out with a note, sealed, and addressed to a person in the adjacent little town.

"Take this, my son, and avail yourself of it. You may be thankful for the precaution before you get back to Santa Maria! And if you are determined to go, good night, and good luck to you!"

Beppo took the note, thanked the Superior for his kindness, and was punted across the stream by one of the brethren. The Superior, looking after him, muttered to

himself, "A shot fired is useful to the right cause any way! If the soldier is killed, the heretic king loses a man, and is shown that the country is disaffected. If the peasant is shot, there is the outcry against the government, and the odium!"

Beppo went down the path by the side of the stream to the little town of Piobico, almost at a run; for the work that was before him at the end of his journey was in his mind, and his angry heart was eager for it. He presented the billet, as he had been bidden, at Piobico, more from the life-long habit of doing submissively what he was told to do by any member of the dominant caste in his native land, than for any other reason. Yet it is as well, he thought to himself, to be on an equality with those who are out against me. The man to whom it was addressed, a quiet enough looking small shopkeeper, asked no questions and made no remark; but having read the note, desired Beppo to pass into a back apartment for a minute, and there put into his hands a musket and a sufficient quantity of ammunition for its immediate use.

"Adieu, friend! I wish you luck!" was all he said as Beppo left his house.

"Adieu, and thanks!" said Beppo, and with the musket over his shoulder he strode off at a rapid pace through the darkness towards Aqualagna, at which point he would fall into the great high road which runs through the valley of the Cardigliano, and by the pass of Furlo. Nevertheless, it was nearly the morning Ave Maria before he came to that village; and by the time he was approaching the pass, the day was breaking.

The pass of the Furlo consists of a tunnel, bored through the living limestone, at a point where the river Cardigliano, through whose valley the road has been previously running, enters a narrow passage between two precipitous walls of rock, which render all further progress impossible by any other means. The Roman legionary was a great road-maker; but he was a pigmy at his work compared to an English navvy. And the greatest works of Roman road-making, which excited

the wonder and admiration of the world for successive centuries, sink into absolute insignificance in comparison with the triumphs of modern science in preparing a way for the iron horse.

And the Furlo, celebrated for so many hundred years, is but a small and commonplace tunnel after all ! Nevertheless, the position and surroundings of it are picturesque and striking. The walls of rock, through which a road-maker yet more puissant than even the English navy has riven a passage for the waters of the Cardigliano, are of a very respectable height, and of a good colour. The channel of the river is narrow, and yet the volume of water that rushes through it is at times very great ; and the road, for some time before entering and after quitting the tunnel, is carried along a ledge of rock at a considerable height above it.

At the spot at which the road enters the tunnel on its way down the stream,—in the direction, therefore, in which Beppo was travelling,—there is a narrow ledge of rock on the face of the wall-like precipice, at nearly the same altitude as the road, and accessible from it. To a traveller coming from that side it seems as if this ledge of rock might have been made available for carrying the road, and the necessity for boring the tunnel avoided. But the traveller coming in the other direction, from the lower ground and the Adriatic side, sees no such ledge when he enters the tunnel at his end. It comes, in fact, to a sudden stop between the two extremities of the tunnel, and offered, therefore, to the first engineers, when they were seeking a passage for their road, merely a balk and deception.

A subsequent generation, however, has utilised this fraudulent ledge as far as it goes, by building on it a little chapel, and what seems, by the remains of it, to have been a dwelling for an officiating priest. I do not know, by-the-bye, that there is any good reason for attributing the happy idea of turning this queerly-placed fragment of soil to such a purpose, to the men of a subsequent generation to that of the original makers of the

road, though the ruined buildings now visible are assuredly of mediæval and not of Roman architects. But the former were as fond of chapels as the latter,—as firmly persuaded of the desirability of erecting them on certain spots, and in certain localities; had the same ideas respecting the nature of the advantages to be derived from building them in such positions, and piety of a precisely similar calibre to prompt them to erect such buildings. There is every probability, therefore, that a fane dedicated to some Pagan deity existed on this ledge of rock, before the now crumbling walls of the lodging for a Christian saint and his officiating priest had appropriated the spot.

As the ruins now stand, entirely filling the narrow space, and hiding all beyond them from the eye of one approaching them from up the stream, it looks on that side as if a way might be found by entering them without passing through the tunnel;—a mere delusion; as at the back of the ruins is the sheer precipice, with the torrent seething and roaring far down beneath them.

Beppo had walked on sturdily all night, had passed through the village of Aqualagna a little before the dawn, and was approaching the entrance of the Furlo tunnel just as the sun was peeping over the tops of the hills, sufficiently to shed a grey cold light down in the ravine of the Cardigliano. He had been carrying his loaded gun carelessly over his shoulder all night, but he now brought it in front of him, ready for use if need were; for the nature of the place, and the observations which the priest had made to him respecting the desirability of avoiding it, and the probability that soldiers would be on the look-out there for deserters if anywhere, occurred to him.

With ear and eye on the alert, therefore, he was on the point of entering the darkness of the tunnel, when he heard a voice that made him start, saluting the dawn by chanting the morning Ave Maria, as it was coming through the gallery in the opposite direction.

He started violently, held his breath, and bent his ear

to listen. But though the voice as it came on could be heard plainly enough, the strange re-echoing of the vaulted arch, and the tricks played with the sounds by the unusual acoustic conditions of the tunnel, made it difficult to recognise it. Beppo sprang to the top of the low parapet wall which borders the road, and from that stepped on to the little space in front of the ruins of the chapel. As he so stood facing the ruins, the precipice and the river were on his right hand, and the road with the entrance to the tunnel on his left. And there, with his musket on his arm, he awaited till the owner of the voice should emerge from the darkness. The voice came on, plaintively chanting its morning song to the Virgin, and it became certain that it was the voice of a woman. But, although some note had, when he first heard it, thrilled him with a recognition, which his ear seemed to have made without the participation of his mind, it was still so changed by the tunnel that he could not with any certainty recognise it.

Presently it came near, still continuing its chant, and, in the next minute, Giulia stepped into the grey light, plodding along with manifest weariness, but still pressing eagerly onward.

Beppo's surprise was so great that it nearly overmastered and replaced his indignation. What could be the meaning of it ! She had evidently, like himself, been walking all the night ; and it seemed impossible to doubt that her journey must in some way or other, and for some purpose or other, have reference to himself. But for what conceivable object could she have chosen to have come thus far away from the spot where he had appointed to meet her ? Not, as it seemed to him certain, with any view of falling in with him. That could scarcely be, inasmuch as his being there at all arose from circumstances which even he himself could not have foretold a few hours ago. If she had had any communication with the priest, he would have told her that there was no chance of meeting him just where, by the unexpected effect of circumstances, she *had* met him. And again without

communication with the priest, she could have had, he thought, no knowledge of his whereabouts whatsoever. Nor could he suppose that she had been directed by the priest to the monastery of Santa Maria della Valle di Abisso, and was on her way thither ; for he had told her in his letter, sent by the messenger, that he would be at the ruined tower at Santa Lucia that Sunday evening ; and she could not, therefore, expect to find him at Santa Maria.

She came along the road, emerging from the tunnel into the light of the dawn, intent only on pursuing her way, and did not see him. In fact, it was hardly possible that she should see him unless she had turned her head so as to look backwards as she came out from the dark passage. Standing on the bit of ground that has been described, he was in fact behind her when she stepped out from it. And she would have passed on without observing him if he had remained silent, for she was walking quickly, and manifestly anxious only to press onwards.

Beppo's first impulse was to fling himself into the road in front of her and at her feet. But the thought of the next second reminded him that his present business with her was of a different kind ; that he was there as an accuser and denouncer, and not as a lover.

"Giulia !" he cried, rather in the voice and tone of a judge arraigning a prisoner before him, than in one of passion or of tenderness.

She started so violently as almost to fall to the ground, yet her surprise was very far less than his had been ; in fact, except the startling suddenness of the call from behind her, and the strangeness of the manner in which he spoke to her, she had no cause for surprise at all. She was travelling in the hope and expectation of meeting him ; and if she had known anything about the distances of the places in question, she would have been expecting to meet him much about then and there.

He added no word to the one he had so sternly uttered, but remained standing, drawn up to his full height, with

his gun on his arm, glaring down on her from the higher ground, about three feet above the level of the road on which she stood.

"Oh, Beppo! thank God I have found you! I have been walking all night in the hope of meeting you, to warn you . . . to warn you"—she went on, out of breath with eagerness and hurry—"not to come to the tower in the churchyard! . . . There are soldiers at Santa Lucia "

"In what house?" demanded he, sternly.

"In our house . . . at Bella Luce."

"What soldiers?" he said, in the same tone.

"Bersaglieri!—an officer and four men."

"Who is the officer?" said Beppo, with a concentrated fury, increased by what appeared to him her attempt at subterfuge and evasion.

"I don't know how it came about. " she began, hesitating and greatly distressed, not because she had had the slightest intention of concealing the fact from him, but because she perceived that he had already conceived the suspicions which she would have given her life to disabuse him of; and because the information would have to reach him, if indeed it had not reached him already, in so unfortunate a manner, and one so calculated to confirm him in them.

"You *do* know!" he said, interrupting her with stern harshness. "Who is the officer living with you at Bella Luce?"

"Living with me!—oh, Heaven, Beppo!" she said, with a sob.

"Who is the officer?" he said for the third time, with increasing harshness and even ferocity of manner.

"It is Corporal Tenda, Beppo. I came here to . . ."

"Vile, shameless, perjured woman!" began he, in a slow, grating voice, with a *crescendo* weight of scorn on each word; but she interrupted him with an energy that broke through the violence of his invective.

"Beppo! Beppo! I must speak! You shall say what you will to me afterwards! I will bear it all! But there is no time to lose. Beppo, I have walked all night,—all night as fast as I could, but I am sure I have had somebody behind me all the time. I could see nobody when I stopped to listen, but from time to time I have heard steps, and I seemed to feel as if somebody was near me and following me. I am afraid the soldiers are on my track. Go back, Beppo! go back! make haste!"

"Feel as if he was near to you! Double—triple traitress! Yes, you have felt his nearness to you—his breath on your cheek. Faugh! loathsome creature! And now you are come to earn your reward and his by betraying me into his hands! Let him come on!"

"Oh, Beppo! oh, God! Beppo! for the Holy Virgin's sake, don't say! don't think . . . kill me! throw me into the river! I will jump in if you bid me! But go back! don't lose time! Hark! there are steps in the tunnel! They are running! They have heard us! Beppo! run!"

"Run where? You have managed it very well! Let your lover come and earn your hand! Let him come! And unless you want to make the next world as well as this a hell to me . . . stand out of the way of this yourself!" tapping the gun-barrel as he spoke the last words.

The steps coming rapidly through the tunnel were now heard close at hand, and Beppo retreated back across the little plot of ground in front of the ruined buildings on the ledge of rock, till he placed his back against the wall, and then examined the priming of his musket.

In the next instant the corporal and one of his men emerged from the tunnel.

"We heard his voice," cried the former. "Let him surrender and all will be well. Signora Giulia, this has been the saddest night's work to me that I ever had to do. Signor Beppo" he called aloud, "I summon you to surrender!"

"And I tell you to take me, if you want me!" answered Beppo, whose voice made the two men first aware of his exact whereabouts. "Observe, I am armed!"

"I have had to do with armed men before now, Signor Beppo," returned the corporal, quietly; "but then I was not so loth to do them a mischief as I am to hurt you; and that makes a difference. But I am going to take you, because it is my duty, and I can't help it. We are two to one; see!"

"You are threc to one, you mean!" said Beppo, with a fierce sneer.

"Oh, Signor Beppo!" replied Tenda, "I should have scorned to say such a word as that, if I had been you. *La Signora Giulia* ——"

"If you mean to take me, come on!" shouted Beppo. "There stands the prize you are playing for. Surely you can't hesitate to come on and win it."

"What must be, must," said the corporal, giving a glance as he spoke at the priming of his own weapon, and springing up on the parapet wall, and then confronting Beppo, who kept his ground with his back to the ruins, about some ten paces from him. It was possible to enter the ruined building, and it might be practicable for a man engaged in escaping from the pursuit of another to dodge about among the fragments of walls of the chapel and the miniature dwelling that had been attached to it; but there was no possibility of escaping from the little bit of land that juts out in the manner that has been described; unless, indeed, the possibility—so desperate as hardly to be considered a possibility—of throwing oneself from the ledge of rock into the boiling stream beneath be deemed such.

The little bit of ground which separated Beppo from the corporal, and on which the ruined walls behind the former are built, will be understood, if the description of the locality has been successfully made intelligible to the reader, to be on the outside of the rock, through which the tunnel was bored, in such sort that a very short passage might have been bored from the chapel into the

tunnel, which passage would, in that case, have entered the tunnel at right angles.

"If you advance a step, I fire!" cried Beppo. "I have a right to fire in self-defence."

"Signor Beppo," said the corporal, standing quite still, and holding the muzzle of his piece pointed upwards, while that of Beppo was levelled at him,—“Signor Beppo, I and my comrade are going to take you, because it is our bounden duty to do so;—not, God knows, because I have any wish or liking for the job; but I beg you to observe for your own sake, that if you shoot me, you will have to answer for murder done in resisting an officer in the execution of his duty, whereas if I should have the misfortune to shoot you, I shall be held to have done no more than my duty under the circumstances. And having warned you how the matter stands, I must do my duty.”

So saying, but without levelling his rifle, the corporal made a stride forwards towards the deserter, and in the same instant Beppo fired, first one barrel, and in the next second the other barrel of his piece, both harmlessly, as was likely enough to be the case, even at ten paces distance, when the aim was that of a peasant, who had never fired a gun under such circumstances, or in a hurry before.

At the sound of the two shots, Giulia, who was in the road at the entrance of the tunnel, screamed and put her hands before her eyes. And the corporal, looking round at her for an instant, exclaimed, “No harm done yet, and there won’t be any now, I hope.”

Beppo heard the scream and the answer, and a bitter thought of her fear for the safety of her lover, and of his reassuring reply to her, even then gave him an additional pang.

But as soon as ever he perceived the failure of his two shots, he dashed into the ruins, at the same moment that the corporal, who was not aware of the impossibility of passing out at the back of them, and so rejoining the road below the tunnel—rushed forwards to secure him.

Beppo, however, who was acquainted with the locality, knew well that there were only two possibilities before him, either surrender, or the mad and desperate alternative of throwing himself down the precipice into the river. But reckless, maddened by passion and despair as he was, and determined only that the man he detested should not have the triumph and the praise, and most of all, as he had fancied in his jealousy, the reward of taking him, he did not hesitate an instant. Throwing down his gun in the ruins, he rushed, while the corporal was rapidly glancing round the chapel, which was the part of the building first entered from the little platform on which they had both been standing when the shots were fired, to a spot where a breach in the wall of what had been the priest's dwelling, opened sheer upon the top of the precipice.

Immediately beneath this, about half-way down to the river, a depth of something more than twenty feet, perhaps, the wall of rock jutted out over the stream, narrowing the distance across it by some eight or ten feet; and on the sort of promontory thus formed, where a deposit of soil had in the course of years accumulated, there had once grown a good-sized tree. Had it been there still, it would have very materially facilitated Beppo's enterprise; but it had long since decayed and fallen, and there was only a fragment of its rotting stump, nearly level with the rock from which it had sprung, remaining. Nevertheless, this stump supplied a certain amount of foot-hold on the promontory in question, making it possible for a human being to find a standing-place there. Possible, that is, if a man could have reached the spot in a quiet manner; but not such as that it should be possible for any man to jump perpendicularly down on it from a height of twenty feet, and there, in the utter absence of anything to catch hold of with the hands, remain stationary.

Nevertheless, without an instant's pause for either examination or reflection, Beppo jumped from the base of the broken wall above down on to the rotting stump, pro-

bably without having at all considered whether it was possible for him to remain there, or what step he should next take. On the other side of the river the rock was nearly as precipitous; but in consequence of the set of the current being to the side of the tunnel and the road, there was a little alluvial soil at the foot of the rocks by the margin of the water on the opposite bank; and in this foot or two of soil there was a growth of dwarfed alders and cistus bushes.

When he lighted quite unhurt on the rotting tree-stump, half-way down the precipice on the other side, his body felt, even more quickly than his brain could reach the conviction, that no effort could enable him to remain there. He must either fall or make a new instantaneous spring. The former was certain, the latter only probable destruction. So, gathering all the vast though seldom used strength of his large bony limbs for one supreme and desperate effort, he sprang right towards the bushes, and, though the leap would have at any other time, and under any other circumstances, appeared to him wholly unposterous and out of the question, lighted among them out little the worse for the adventure.

Of course all this was done and accomplished in a few seconds, and when Corporal Tenda, blundering on in his search through the ruins, came to the broken place in the wall from which Beppo had jumped, he could hardly believe his eyes, when he saw him safe on the other side of the Cardigliano.

"I thought you were going to take me, Signor Caporale?" panted Beppo. "Go and tell those who sent you, and her who brought you, that it is not so easy to take a Romagnole *contadino* who does not choose to be taken.

Tenda, on catching sight of him, had, in an instant, instinctively raised his rifle to his shoulder, and had his finger on the trigger; but after a moment of hesitation he threw the muzzle up.

"It would be my duty to shoot you dead where you stand; and mind, when you join us you'll have a deal to

learn, for we Bersaglieri don't fire in the way you did just now. My duty, and nothing more nor less," he repeated; "but I can't do it. I *can't* do it, in the first place, for her sake, and in the second place, because it would be one part for duty and two parts for myself; and that would make murder of it. I shan't shoot you, let it be how it will."

"What! Won't that serve the turn with her as well as taking me? Fire away, Corporal; she will be just as much pleased, and I a deal better."

"Can't have the pleasure of serving you; I'm not going to do it, I tell you. Though for speaking in the way you do, you deserve it a deal better than you do the love of the prettiest and best girl that ever breathed. So now I shall leave you to get out of that hole you have jumped into the best way you can; and bid you good morning till the next time we meet, when I hope I may be able to knock a little sense into that hard head and jealous-mad heart of yours."

So saying, the corporal turned away, and going back into the road, told Giulia that Beppo had escaped safe and sound to the other side of the river by taking such a jump as no man ever took before; and that they had nothing for it but to return by the way they had come, and hope for better luck another time.

He admitted that, fearing they might possibly miss their object by waiting till the time named in the note discovered by his comrade, he had determined on keeping watch at the ruined tower, and that on seeing her start on her walk the previous evening, he had felt no doubt at all that her purpose was to warn Beppo that he was waited for, and that the only way to lay hands on him therefore was to follow her, without letting her know that she was watched.

"And now, what does he think of me?" said Giulia, with a sob that seemed to burst her heart.

"And what will he think when he knows all, Signora? Think of that. He *shall* know all; trust me for that. I would not shoot him just now when I might have

done it, and ought by rights to have done it, on purpose. If he don't think and feel that he is the happiest fellow in Christendom, and that no man was ever blessed by the love of such a girl before," said the corporal, speaking with immenso energy, "he must be a bad fellow,—and I don't think he *is* a bad fellow at bottom. Shall we have the honour of escorting you home, Signora?"

"No, please, Signor Caporale; I must return alone as I came. I must indeed, please! I must get some rest before I can walk home. I should like to sleep a little. They will be very angry with me at home. Perhaps you will have the goodness, Signor Caporale, to say that I am coming home;—that you have seen me; and—and—perhaps, if you don't mind, the best thing you could say, would be to tell them that I went away secretly to try to warn Beppo that you were after him."

"That shall be it, Signora. I don't mind owning that I have been beaten by a lady. We leave you then, to come home at your leisure by yourself."

So the two soldiers set off on their return to Bella Luce, and Giulia was left alone, sitting on the bank by the road-side at the mouth of the tunnel.

CHAPTER IV.

ACROSS THE RIVER.

GIULIA was left, when the corporal and his companion turned to go back to Bella Luce, sitting on the bank by the side of the road where it emerged from the tunnel of the Furlo, on the side farthest from the river. The corporal had been rather unwilling to leave her there, not from any feeling that she had any need of protection, for there was nothing either strange or unusual or imprudent in a country girl such as Giulia traversing the country alone, although she was somewhat unusually far from home; but he thought she must be very tired with her night's journey, and might probably need some rest before she could set out on her return. But he had felt that under the peculiar circumstances of the case, it might be better and more agreeable to her that any aid she might need should come from anybody rather than from him. He had felt that she spoke very genuinely her real wish when she asked him to go and leave her to follow alone. He guessed, too, that she would most likely try to have some communication with Beppo across the river; and he was very conscious that if any good was to

be done by any such conversation, it must not take place in his presence. He felt, too, that if it did become known to Beppo that he had returned to Bella Lucca, leaving her there in his immediate neighbourhood, that fact alone would go far to mitigate Beppo's anger.

Nevertheless, if the corporal had guessed how entirely poor Giulia's whole stock of strength and courage had been expended; and still more, if it had for an instant occurred to his mind that she had not a single *baiocco* in her pocket, he assuredly, despite the good reasons given above, would not have left her by the road-side.

In truth, for the first few minutes after the corporal and his subordinate had disappeared into the darkness of the tunnel, Giulia, sitting on the bank, felt as if she was going to die. The fact was, that she was very near fainting, and for a few minutes very genuinely thought that she was going to die. Her head swam round, a cold perspiration covered her brow; and she felt a horrible deadly sensation of sickness. In truth, the violent and painful emotion which she had undergone during the last quarter of an hour,—for the whole of the scene described in the last chapter could not have occupied a longer time,—coming after long fasting, and the great fatigue of her night's journey, had been too much for her.

She was still fasting; for though she had her loaf of bread still with her, she had not allowed herself time to eat any of it, or to rest; her only object during her forced night-march had been to press on, that she might be able to warn Beppo in time; and the steps behind her which she had heard from time to time throughout the night had kept her in a continued state of nervous anxiety, and had driven her to press onwards with all the speed she could make.

However, she did not faint. But for a short time all consideration of the circumstances of her present position gave way before the necessity of battling with the sensations of physical weakness.

Then after a little while she began to think, to recollect and realise all that she had seen and heard during the

last quarter of an hour. She put her hands up to her forehead, and pushing back all the abundance of raven black hair, and resting her head on the palms of her hands, and her elbows on her knees, she went over all the train of circumstances, from her buying the secret of Beppo's hiding place from the Piobico man, to the issue of her endeavours in their present total miscarriage. Then, as her mind gradually found its way down to the immediate present, passing by the horrible, horrible reminiscence of Beppo's last words to her with as slight and rapid a glance as possible, she was conducted to the consideration of his present position. She had heard the corporal bawling out to him something about getting out of the hole he had jumped into as best he might. What hole could he have jumped into? Had he got out? Might not he need assistance to do so? Was he not perhaps still somewhere very near her?

With these thoughts in her head, she dragged herself to her feet, and found to her great surprise that her head turned and swam so that she could with difficulty stand. However, in a few minutes this got better, and she was able to begin her search for Beppo, if indeed it was to be supposed that he was still in the immediate neighbourhood.

She got up on the parapet wall, and thence on to the grass-grown bit of the ledge of the rock in front of the ruined chapel; then passed into the building, and looking round it, as the corporal had done, saw Beppo's gun on the ground at the foot of one of the walls. Close by it was a door of communication with the part of the building which had been the priest's residence. Giulia passed through this, and wandering thence into a second little bit of a room saw the breach in the wall, which opened on the river and the precipice, at the bottom of which the river was raging along through its narrow channel.

She approached the edge of the rock, on which the lowest stones only of the wall which had been built there remained in that part of it, and looked out on to the stream

below her, and the opposite wall of rock on the other side of it. Her first impression was that certainly no human being could have passed *that* way! But as she cast her eyes directly down towards the river, mentally measuring the distance that separated the spot where she stood from it, she saw that part of the precipice where the rock jutted out, and saw the rotten stump of the tree which had grown there. It seemed to her impossible that any man could have jumped from the top of the rock on to that small spot, twenty feet or more below it; and still more impossible, that any one could have passed from that spot by any means save falling into the river. Nevertheless, gazing down, she thought she could see the impression of feet on the soft matter of the decayed tree stump. And carrying her eye thence across the ravine to the opposite margin of the stream, away down at the bottom, she thought she saw a movement among the bushes there.

It was likely enough that some movement of her own on the edge of the precipice where she stood had caused a corresponding movement among the bushes below; for Beppo had been watching her from his covert among them ever since she had appeared at the breach in the wall.

In the next minute she caught a glimpse of his figure among the thick growth of alder and cistus bushes.

"Oh! Beppo!" she exclaimed in an accent that ought to have carried to his mind unmistakable conviction of the nature of her sentiments towards him. "Are you safe? Are you hurt?"

But Beppo's mind was, as the corporal had phrased it, "jealous-mad!" And consequently, neither ear nor eye, nor any other sense, could bring true testimony to it. The virus was still rankling in his heart, and poisoning every sense and all his understanding.

"Ay!" he answered; but not until she had a second time called "Beppo! Beppo!"—"Ay! I am safe from you this time! Your friend must try again, if he means to make profit or credit out of catching me!"

"Beppo ! Beppo ! You cannot think what you say ! You cannot ; it is impossible !"

"It *is* wonderful !" he retorted ; really feeling as he spoke that it was so. "It *is* very wonderful ! And if I had not seen with my own eyes, I could not have believed the depth of baseness to which a worthless woman can fall. I knew you to be bad. I knew you to be false and heartless," he went on at the top of his voice, "when I left you that day of the drawing in the streets of Fano ! What did I deserve other than fresh treachery and new falsehood, when I gave a thought to you after what I had seen—seen with my own eyes, and heard with my own ears, in the Palazzo Bollandini ? I deserved it, and I have received it in abundant measure. I knew that you were bad ! But I did not think even then, that you could have fallen so low as to make yourself a spy and a lure in the hands of these strangers for the delivering up into their hands of your own countryman and kinsman."

"Beppo ! Beppo !" groaned the poor girl in a voice of agony.

But the jealous ear is deaf to the evidence of accent, as to all other.

"Do not suppose," he continued—having now, at least, an opportunity of doing to his heart's content what he had come from his retreat in the Valle di Abisso to do—"Do not suppose, that when I set out to meet you at the ruined tower after the Ave Maria this evening, I did not know of your falseness. My object in coming there was no other than once, before leaving Bella Luec for ever, to let you know my estimation of it, and of you. I knew that you had plotted to cause your lover to be quartered in my father's house. I knew that you were living under the same dishonoured roof with him ! But I did *not* imagine that you were scheming to betray me into his hands ! I do think and hope that another Romagnole woman could not be found who would do the like."

"Beppo, your words are killing me. They are stabbing my heart like sharp swords !" she said.

"Those who can do such things are not of the sort to

be much hurt, worse luck ! by the telling of them. Are not my words true ? ”

“ They are false, Beppo ; false from the beginning to the end ; as false as you say I am ! But I know,” she added, after a moment’s pause, “ that you believe them to be true ; and it is that which is killing me !—killing me ! for I cannot bear it. I could bear all else, if you believed me true ! ”

“ True ! You true ! It makes me sick to hear such horrible hypocrisy. What have I said of you that you have not fully deserved ? What have I said that was not strictly true ? ” he asked, with the lurking irrepressible longing that even yet, in some incomprehensible manner, she might be able to show that all the past was only a hideous and distorted dream. For short of this, he could imagine no means of getting rid of the damning facts.

“ What have you said of me that was not strictly true, Beppo ? ” she repeated. “ All, all, all you have said has been utterly false. It is false that I have been false to you ! It is false that the corporal is my lover ! It is false that I had anything to do with bringing him to Bella Luce ! I bring him to Bella Luce ! The Holy Virgin help me ! How could I cause him to be sent there ? It is false, falsest and most cruel of all, to say that I thought to betray you into his hands ! It is all false ; and it is very, very, very cruel ! ”

“ Not true that you have been false to me ? Doubtless you have forgotten all that passed between you and me the night before you left Bella Luce to go to the cursed, cursed city, under the half-way tree in the path to Santa Lucia ; of course, you have forgotten it ? ”

“ Forgotten it ! Great Heaven ! Oh, Beppo, Beppo ! Do men forget such things ? Believe me, we others never forget them ; no, not if we ever so much laboured and longed to do so—let alone when—when—when they are—” here her voice was interrupted and broken by sobbing, —“ when they are all—all in the world—”

“ I cannot hear what you say ! Do speak up, if you want me to hear you—not that it much matters,” bawled

Beppo, from the other side of the river ; for it seemed very specially important to him not to lose a single word of that particular part of her discourse ; and just at the most interesting point of it her sobs interfered to make her utterance indistinct.

It was hard upon her to have to bawl the poor little hesitating confession of her beating heart at the top of her voice. However, she was happily a stout, healthy-nerved *contadina*, and not trained to a just appreciation of the proprieties of delicate situations. So she resumed aloud :—

“I was saying, Beppo, that people don’t easily forget the only happy moment they have in their lives to remember.”

But as soon as the sentence thus succinctly and clearly enunciated stood out before her in high relief against the surrounding silence, she was startled at the distinctness of the import of it ; and a bright blush, wasting its sweetness on the solitude,—for no eye was near enough to see it,—spread over her face. Ought she to have admitted that ? Well ! let the admission stand ; it was true ; she was miserable now, and reckless in her misery. She would rather—ah ! how much rather—that Beppo should at least take away with him the belief that she had at all events once loved him. Let the admission stand. Let Beppo know, if he would so far believe her, that the moment when she had received the declaration of his love, and had permitted him to do that which she had declared no man whom she did not love should ever do, was the only really happy one she had ever known. She had said it. It was the truth. Let it stand.

But Beppo was too deeply incensed, had too long a bill of transgressions and damning proofs against her stored up in his mind, to allow himself to be mollified by such a confession, although, despite his utmost endeavours to keep up his righteous indignation at a white heat, and to steel his heart against her, the admission he had heard was inexpressibly precious to him.

“Ah, Guilia, Guilia ! such remembrances are neither

for you nor for me. You have no right to them. If you have *not* forgotten, it were better for you if you had. If all you then said was false, great God ! was there ever woman so false before ? If it was true, was there ever woman so light and fickle ? If people do not forget the happy moments of their lives, neither can they forget those that have been the most miserable. Oh, Giulia ! can I ever forget do you think, what I saw in that infamous Palazzo Bollandini ? Do you think that that is not stamped upon my heart for ever ? ”

“ What did you see in the Palazzo Bollandini ? ” asked Giulia, in some slight degree encouraged to hope that possibly all might not yet be lost, by a scarcely perceptible change in Beppo’s manner.

“ What did I see ? Oh, Giulia ! can you ask me ? Can you wish me to repeat what it withered my heart to look on ? Did I not see enough to show me that that man was your accepted lover ? What was your conduct to me ? And what was your manner to him ? Would not any stranger have seen, without any room for doubt, which was the acceptable, and which was the unacceptable, to you of the two ? ”

“ It is not true, it never was true, or likely to be true, that Corporal Tenda was my accepted lover. If a stranger had supposed so, you ought never to have supposed so, Beppo. But neither were you my accepted lover ! ” (It did occur to Beppo, for an instant, that he detected the shade of an emphasis upon the verb in the past tense, *were* ; but he resolutely scouted the idea from his mind.) “ And it was very difficult for me,” she continued, “ to know how to behave ; I tried to do right, God help me if I did not. Corporal Tenda was only an acquaintance. I had no choice but to make acquaintance with him. I did not seek him ! ”

“ Do you mean to assert that he did not make love to you ? ” asked Beppo, fiercely.

“ It was not my fault if he did ! I could not help it ! I gave him no encouragement ! He knows, and he will say that I did not ! He will say so, for he is an honourable man. ”

"You admit, then, that he did make love to you?" blazed out Beppo.

"He asked me to be his wife; and I told him that could never, never be! I should not say so," she added, feeling that some justification for making such a revelation was needed, "if I was not sure that he would be ready to say the same!"

"Asked you to marry him! How could he ask you to marry him, and he a corporal in the army? A pretty marriage! You must know very well that a soldier on service is not allowed to marry."

"He wanted me to promise to marry him when he leaves the army. He is to inherit a farm of his own before long; and then he will leave the service!"

"You seem to know all his affairs."

"How could I help knowing what he told me? Most girls," she could not refrain from adding, "would have thought it a great offer to a poor girl like me; but I—could not—marry him!"

"When did you refuse him? Was it at Fano, pray, or at home, at Bella Luce?"

"At Fano, Beppo!"

"Then what brought him up to Bella Luce?" asked Beppo quickly, in the tone of a man who thinks that he has caught his adversary in a manifest falsehood.

"How should I know, Beppo? What could I have to do with it? Of course, he could not come without being ordered by his officers. What could he have to do with it himself?"

"Shall I tell you what he had to do with it?" said Beppo, who, despite all his fury, began to feel that Giulia was getting the best of the argument, and, at the same time, that it would be like pouring new life into him to find that he had not a word to say in justification of his suspicions. "Shall I tell you," he continued, devoutly hoping that he might be utterly confuted, "what he had to do with it? Soldiers are to be sent to the houses of those who have escaped from the conscription into the hills. 'Send me,' says he to his officers, 'to Bella Luce.

I think I know a way of finding out Beppo Vanni's hiding-place! There's one there that will manage that for me! And perhaps, if I bring him in, the colonel will recommend me,' says he, 'for a permission to take a wife!' Do you think I did not see it all?"

"But he did not want to marry me till he was out of the army, Beppo!" said Giulia simply; "and besides, I told you that I had already refused him before I left Fano!"

"Oh, yes! men do not always take a girl's 'no' for a 'no' for good and all. Is it likely that it was a mere chance that brought him, of all the men at Fano, to my father's house? Do you suppose I can believe that?"

"I don't know, Beppo! I only know that I had nothing to do with bringing him there; and that I was very, very sorry to see him come, and never was more surprised in my life! And I don't believe that he had anything to do with his being sent, or that he wanted to come."

"Oh, that is very likely, when you own that he was in love with you, and wanted you to marry him!"

"But I had refused him, Beppo, before; and all the time he has been there, he has hardly ever spoken to me; and then it was about you."

"Ay! about the way to hunt me out!"

"No, Beppo. But about the way to persuade you to give yourself up;—not for his sake, but for your own!"

"Oh! of course; all for my sake!"

"Why, he could get no good by your giving yourself up at Fano! You need not give yourself up to him," urged Giulia.

"He seemed rather anxious that I should give myself up to him just now, though," retorted Beppo, bitterly.

"Of course, it is his duty to take you if he can. And if he can, he will. But you can put yourself out of his power by giving yourself up at Fano!"

"You seem very desirous that I should give myself up, Giulia, and be sent out of the country. All for my own good, of course, too, like your friend the corporal!"

"It *is* for your own good, Beppo. I was grieved

enough when you drew the bad number. God knows whether it was a grief to me ! But I know that going out of the country to serve for a few years as a soldier, is better than going out into the mountains to live as a bandit for all your life ! ”

“ But who ever thought of living as a bandit all my life ? Ah, Giulia ! if I only could have hoped for your love, all the rest would have mattered little—and without it all the rest matters little ! I should have come back to Bella Luce as soon as the look-out for the men was over, and the soldiers gone, and all might have been well ! ”

“ You could never have come back, Beppo. ”

“ It was the priest himself who told me so, ” rejoined Beppo ; “ they may spread reports to frighten the men, but do you think the priest don’t know what he is talking about ? ”

“ I believe, ” answered Giulia, speaking as if she were saying what she hardly dared to utter, “ that the priest knew a great deal better than he said, and that all he cared about was to prevent the men from going to the army. You think he cared about you and Signor Paolo ? But what did he send off Niccoló Bossi into the hills for ? Do you think he cared about him ? ”

“ Anyway, ” rejoined Beppo, rather startled at the force of this argument, “ what should you know about the truth of the matter, Giulia ? ”

“ I know it from more than one down in the city, who would not say one thing for another. But specially there is Signor Sandro, the lawyer. He knows all about it, and will tell you if you ask him. Why, what do you think he said to Signor Paolo when he knew that you had gone off to the hills ? He told him, that of course there could be no thought any more of anything between you and *la Signora Lisa* ! that she could never marry a man who had made a bandit of himself. ”

“ Did he say that ? how do you know it ? ” asked Beppo, with more of natural interest in his manner than he had shown before.

“ I know it ; because, when he came back from Fano

in such a temper as I never knew him in before, he told *la padrona*, and *la padrona* let it out to me the next morning."

"So, all that is over. Well, there is some good got out of taking to the hills, anyway," said Beppo, with a degree of approach to his natural manner, which Giulia hailed as a most blessed symptom of future possibilities. She made no reply, however, and after a pause, he resumed, not in the bitterly indignant tone in which he had spoken at the beginning of the conversation, but still sombrely :—

"But even if I were to take all that you have been telling me for gospel; even if, despite what I saw in Fano, and what I heard at home, I were to believe it all, what is to be said about your decoying me here, and then bringing the soldiers to take me? You write me a letter. I send you one to tell you that I will come to a certain place, hoping to see there one person alone, and you meet me on the road bringing two soldiers with you. Ah, Giulia! what can be said to this?"

"Only the truth, Beppo; and I will tell you the truth. As the Holy Virgin and the saints hear me, I will tell you nothing but the truth. And I am sure that the corporal, ay, and his men too, will tell you the same. When I came to know the truth about the consequences of going away to the hills, and being sure that you looked upon it as a very different matter from what it really was, I determined to try all I possibly could to persuade you to come back. But the first thing was to find out where you were; and I went up one day to be with *la Nunziata* at the *cura*, and there, by good fortune, I saw a man who was a stranger come to speak to the *curato*; and the Holy Virgin put it into my head that he was come from you. So when he went away from the *cura* I slipped out after him, and I came up with him just behind the ruined tower at the other end of the churchyard; and I said, 'Young man, you have come from Beppo Vanni?' Just so. And he was taken aback, like, and said Yes, he was. And then I persuaded him to tell me the name of the

place where you were, and to take a letter to you for me. You had my letter, Beppo?"

"Yes; I had the letter," said Beppo, beginning, with an infinite sense of relief, to believe that he had been guilty of very monstrous injustice.

"And I agreed that he should bring back a letter if you would give him one, and put it in a certain hole in the wall of the tower. But it was very difficult for me to know how to go to get the letter without being seen. And I got leave from the *padrona* to spend a day with Nunziata at the *cura* on purpose to find an opportunity. But two of the soldiers came up to the church that day and stayed all the day in the churchyard watching, so that I could not get an opportunity to go to the tower without being seen."

"Was the corporal one of the two men, Giulia, who followed you up to the *cura*?" asked Beppo.

"No, Beppo; they were two of the soldiers. If it had been the corporal, I should have told you that it was he. So I found that there was no chance of getting the letter except in the night; and I stayed up, after all the others were gone to bed, and stole out of the house as quietly as I could, and ran all the way up to the churchyard, and got to the tower, and found the hole in the bricks, and got the letter, and I was so glad. And the moonlight was very strong, so I was able to read the letter directly; and just when I had read it, I looked up, and was going to run home as fast as I could, when I saw two of the soldiers who had heard me go out of the door, and had got up and followed me up the hill on purpose to see whether I was not going to get a letter from you somewhere or other. And they had been quite close to me all the time without my knowing it, and had heard the letter, and so they knew that you were to come to the tower on Sunday evening; and they said they must report it to the corporal, and that they should catch you when you came. And then I was in despair, and was all that night and all the next day thinking how I could prevent you from falling into the trap. And I thought that the only possi-

ble way was to go and meet you on the road, and warn you myself. So I started when they were all in bed, and I did not know where Santa Maria della Valle di Abisso was; but the man who came to the *cura* said that he came from Piobico, and I knew that this was the road to Piobico. So I determined to walk all night till I met you, that I might warn you to go back. But the soldiers were watching all the time in the tower, and saw me go by, and followed me all the way all through the night, and when I met you they were close behind. And that is the whole truth, Beppo, as the Holy Virgin sees my heart."

The simplicity and evident candour with which Giulia had told her long story carried conviction with it at last to Beppo's mind. He felt that he had much for which to obtain pardon;—a very long arrear of gratitude to pay. Nevertheless, the truths that were being brought home to his mind carried with them so exquisite a delight, that he could not forbear from availing himself of the communicative mood in which Giulia appeared to be, to obtain some further pleasures of the same kind.

"And is it really true that you absolutely and altogether refused the corporal's offer, Giulia?" said he, speaking as if he was really seeking for further information.

"Absolutely and altogether!" exclaimed Giulia. "Of course it was absolutely and altogether. Oh, Beppo, don't you know that I could not marry him?"

"It is true," said he, hypocritically, "that I have been told that he is one of the worst characters in the service!"

"Oh, who can have said so great a falsehood?" said Giulia, very energetically. "I assure you, Beppo, that he bears a very good character, and is much thought of by his officers."

"It was the priest who said that he was notoriously one of the worst men in the army," replied Beppo; "he told babbo so, at the same time that he told us, Giulia,

that you had made yourself talked of all over Fano by flirting with him ! ”

“ Oh, Beppo ! Is it possible that the priest said that ? Is it possible ? Indeed, indeed, Beppo, it is very untrue ! And I do think that the *curato* cannot be a good man. Corporal Tenda is well known to be a very respectable man ! ”

“ Why did you refuse him, then, Giulia ? ” said Beppo, reaching at last the point he had been driving at ever since he had brought the conversation back to the subject of the corporal.

“ Beppo, Beppo ! *can* you still ask me why I refused him, or any other man in the world ? Do you not know ? Is it not for me rather to say that *you* have forgotten ? ”

“ No, Giulia, I have not forgotten ! I have forgotten nothing. I could repeat to you every word that you said to me, and every word that I said to you, under the great half-way tree—every word ! Would you let me repeat them to you now, Giulia ? Can you forgive me ? ”

“ Beppo ! Oh, Beppo, Beppo ! forgive you ! Say it all again, repeat all that you said that night, and see if I can forgive you ! ”

“ But it is so far off, Giulia, across the river ! I wish I could come over to that side ! ” said Beppo, with a strong feeling that the conversation in question could not be advantageously rehearsed with a river rushing between the parties to the dialogue.

“ And how ever are you to come over to this side ? ” cried Giulia, recalled for the first time to the immediate practical difficulties of the situation ; “ how can you come here, or how can I come to you ? ”

“ *Per Bacco !* ” exclaimed Beppo, looking around him ; “ I don’t very well see how I am to get out of this place without help. It is quite impossible to get back the way I came here ! It is out of the question to climb the rocks on this side. It is not far down the stream to a place where I could get up the bank on that side ;—just below the end of the tunnel. But the river is running at a

terrible pace ! With a rope to help me I could do it well enough ! But——”

“ Halloa ! ” interrupted a new comer on the scene, appearing behind Giulia, at the break in the wall on the top of the precipice ; “ you don’t see how to get out of that, you say ? But I don’t understand how the devil you got there ! ”

CHAPTER V.

SIGNOR STEFANO PRINATI, OF CAGLI.

GIULIA, on hearing these words uttered behind her, turned round with a great start, but was immediately reassured by perceiving at a glance that the new comer was of her own class and country—a *contadino* of the Romagna. He was a jolly-looking, middle-aged man, with a broad white hat, and a broad red face, and a broad buff-cloth waistcoat; evidently a well-to-do farmer, or perhaps even a small proprietor of the hill-country.

“In the first place,” said the stranger, “let us ask the young woman whether she wishes you to get away from where you are. For there’s two different cases, you will observe, when a gentleman and lady are on different sides of a river. There is one case when they are both agreed to wish themselves on the same side; and there is another case when one of the two is devilish glad to have the river between them; and, *per Bacco!* there’s a third case, continued the speaker, striking his hands violently together as he spoke, and looking hard at Giulia, “there’s the case in which both parties are well pleased to remain on different sides of the stream. To think of my forget-

ting that now ! To be sure," he continued, argumentatively, "our friend on the other side was manifesting a desire to get out of his present position, but it might be with the intention that you should change to his side, Signorina. Never take anything for granted, you know. I never do. Do you, Signorina ?"

"No, Sir," said Giulia, hesitating and gazing at him, only because he had just told her not to do so.

"Yes, you do. You have taken it for granted that I am a farmer ; but I am not. See the consequence of taking things for granted. I am a lawyer—Stefano Prinati, of Cagli, Signorina——"

"Why, you are taking things for granted, Signor Prinati, yourself," said Giulia, with a laugh that indicated how very considerably matters were changed with her, and what a very different aspect the entire sublunary world wore to her eyes from what it did half an hour ago.

"The deuce I am ! And pray, what am I taking for granted, and what do you know about the matter ?" said Signor Stefano Prinati, with an amount of surprise and interest that seemed altogether to take his attention off the state of things that had at first arrested it.

"Why, you never saw me before," said Giulia, "and you call me Signorina. How can you tell, pray, that I am not *sposa* ?"

"*Per Dio* ! it's true," said the lawyer, looking at her with an expression of the utmost contrition, and dropping his head on his bosom. "I've been and done it again. Signora, I will confess the truth. I have been taking things for granted all my life, and living in a perpetual condition of wrong-boxedness, if I may use the expression, in consequence. And when I said I never took things for granted, it was the enunciation of a future resolution rather than of a past fact. But, alas ! I've been and done it again !"

The man's repentance for this relapse appeared to be so sincerely genuine, that gentle Giulia felt quite sorry for her little joke. "But, Signor Prinati," she said,

consolingly, "at all events this time you were not wrong, as I was in taking you for a farmer. I am no *sposata*."

"Still, I had no business to take it for granted," said the lawyer, ruefully. "But to return to the previous question,—Do you, Signorina, desire that the gentleman on the other side of the river should get across to this side?"

"Certainly, that is my wish," said Giulia.

"For better or worse? which means in the present circumstances and context, whether with dry skin or wet through?"

"Certainly, if he cannot get over dry, he must come through the water," returned Giulia.

"And you, friend, on the other side. Are you only on the other side of the river, or on the other side of the question also?"

"Of course I want to get out of this, if that is what you mean," said Beppo, who did not seem to enter into the stranger's humour so readily as Giulia.

"You are quite right, my friend, in not taking it for granted that that is what I mean. That, however, is my meaning. The next question is, how do you mean to set about it?"

"Upon my word, I don't see how to get away from this bit of bank without help, not with the river as it is now," said Beppo.

"And how can one give you any help? What sort of help do you want?" said the farmer-like lawyer.

"Well, if anybody could throw me a rope from the lower end of the tunnel, and make the other end of it fast to the rail by the road-side, I could manage it then."

"If a rope would serve the turn, as it happens I can help you to what you want; for I am carrying home a new rope for my well from Fossombrone in my *calessino*."

"Where is the *calessino*, Signor?" said Giulia, eagerly.

"Here at the end of the tunnel. I was coming through, and hearing voices up here among the ruins, as I got to the mouth of it, I thought I would see what on earth

anybody could be talking at the top of their voice up here about. If I go for the rope, Signor Beppo (I am not taking for granted, observe, that your name is Beppo, for I heard the Signorina call you so), if I get the rope and help you over to this side, will you promise to tell me how, in the name of all the *saltimbanchi* in Christendom, you got where you are? Is it a bargain?"

"Yes, Signor, it is a bargain. You get a rope across to me, and I will tell you and show you how I got here. But I won't promise to do it again, mind."

So Signor Prinati went to his *culessino*, which he had left standing in the road—taking it for granted that the little Marchesan pony would stand quiet while he satisfied his curiosity as to the talking he had heard going on among the ruins,—and got out of the little box under the seat a coil of bran-new rope, and proceeded with it, accompanied by Giulia, to the lower end of the tunnel. At that point the rocks on the opposite side of the river are as high and as precipitous as in the upper part of the pass; but on the side of the road just where it comes out at the lower end of the tunnel, there is only a high grassy bank, very steep indeed, but not so much so as to be impassable.

At this point there are some strong white timber posts and rails along the edge of the road, to which Beppo intended that the end of the rope should be fastened. Giulia and the lawyer stooped and passed under these, and scrambled down the turfy bank to the edge of the stream, where, when they had come as close as they could to the place where the bank ended and the precipitous rock began, they were about fifty feet lower down the stream than Beppo on the other side.

The lawyer was about to cast the rope, but Beppo called out to him—

"If you will take my advice, Signor, you will fasten the end of the rope to the road-posts before casting it. Then, if you fail to throw it so that I can catch it, the rope will be safe; otherwise we might chance to lose it altogether."

"Right, friend ; I was taking it for granted again, that I could throw you one end without fail."

So Signor Stefano climbed the bank again, fastened the rope, and then once more came down to the edge of the water to attempt the feat of throwing the other end of it to Beppo, while Giulia stood looking on. The exertion of throwing it had to be made somewhat at a disadvantage, for the spot on which the lawyer had to stand while he did it was not of the surest standing ground in the world. Gathering the rope into a coil, he flung it overhanded with all his force, and pitched it into the water little more than half way towards the spot on the opposite bank, which was the nearest that Beppo could get to in order to reach it.

"There would have been the loss of a good rope, if it had not been for your thought of fastening it first, Signor Beppo," said the lawyer, proceeding to draw it up out of the river. "But if I don't do much better than that, it seems to be likely that you will stay where you are for the present."

"Try again, Signor ; perhaps the rope was stiff," said Giulia.

"Oh, yes ; I am going to try again. But I am very much afraid I am not going to do it. It's a trick rather out of my line, you see."

The second attempt succeeded no better than the first ; and again the rope had to be drawn up out of the water.

"Let me try, Signor," said Giulia. "I don't take it for granted that I can do it, but I can but try."

"What you'll most likely do will be to fall into the water yourself," said the lawyer.

"Take care, Giulia. That might end the job the worst way of all," cried Beppo. "Oh ! Signor, you take a good hold of her gown behind while she throws."

"Ay, that will be the plan ; and you may take it for granted, this once, that I won't let her go. Now for it !"

Giulia took the coil of rope, not overhanded, as Signor Stefano had done, but underhanded ; and carefully leaving a sufficient length to reach Beppo slack and uncoiled, and

first swinging the coil in her hand backwards and forwards three or four times, launched it towards Beppo with so true an aim that the coiled part of the rope fell around his head and shoulders. But the force she had used in throwing it made her foot slip; and if the lawyer had not been as good as his word, and held on firmly to her dress, she must have slipped into the stream; as it was, she recovered her footing in an instant.

"*Bravo*, Signora Giulia! for I perceive that to be your name from what your friend said just now. *Bravo, davvero!*"

"Thanks, Giulia. You see it is written, that it is you who are to be the saving of me," cried Beppo.

"No, it is still you who must do that," said Giulia. "I can but at best put into your hands the means of doing it."

Beppo understood her perfectly well; but of course the surface meaning only of her words was intelligible to Signor Stefano.

"She speaks as well as she throws, Signor Beppo," said he. "You have got the rope you asked for,—quite enough to hang yourself with; but I confess I do not quite see what other use you are going to put it to."

"I shall manage my part, Signor, never fear," returned Beppo. "Now, if you will kindly draw up all the rope except what I keep here, and fix it well round the posts, so that I may have a tight pull upon it, I think I can get across. With the help of the rope and a good jump I think I can clear more than half the distance, and as soon as ever I fall into the water you must haul up the rope as fast as you can and pull me out."

"You'll be sure to keep fast hold of your end," said the lawyer.

"That you *may* take for granted," said Beppo. "I don't want to be drowned *now*," he added, after a little pause, in a significant manner, that was intended only for Giulia's ears, or at least, only for her understanding.

The preparations were made as he directed; Giulia and the lawyer planted themselves one on each side of

the rope ready to haul in as soon as ever Beppo should have made his plunge.

"Now then," cried he, twining the end of the rope firmly round his horny, brown hands, "here goes!"

He sprung, giving a strong pull on the rope at the same moment, and in the next plunged into the eddying river, having cleared a good two-thirds of the distance between him and his friends on the other side.

They lost not a second in pulling away with a will, and in less than a minute landed him on the bank, dripping like a Newfoundland dog fresh from a swim, but not otherwise the worse for his adventure.

"Oh, Beppo! keep off! don't shake yourself near me!" cried Giulia, as he scrambled breathless up the bank to the road.

"And now, then, you have to tell me how you got on to that bit of bank," cried Signor Stefano.

But to make his promised information intelligible, it was necessary to return to the ruins on the ledge of rock on the outside of the tunnel. And to do this—inasmuch as they were now standing in the road at the lower end of the tunnel, and the ledge of rock was only accessible from the road at the upper end of it, as has been previously explained,—it was necessary to pass through that dark passage. And although Beppo had carefully complied with Giulia's request that he would "keep off," and not "shake himself over her," up to the time when they all three entered it together, yet when they emerged into the sunshine at the other end, Giulia's dress was so much wetted all down one side, that Signor Stefano could not help saying as he looked at her,

"Why, I declare, he has been shaking himself over you, Signora. You look wet through."

Giulia laughed and blushed; but she only said,

"Now you are taking things for granted again, Signor Stefano."

"If you want to know how I got across the river, Signor Stefano, you must come up to the place in the broken wall where you first found *la Signorina Giulia*.

There," he continued, when they had reached the spot, "do you see that old stump of a tree down there, on the jutting part of the rock, exactly underneath us? Well, I jumped from here right down on to that; and when I got there, finding it was not a good place for a permanent residence, I concluded to take another jump right into the bushes on the other side there. That was the way I got there."

"Well, but what, in the name of all the saints in Paradise, made you dream of taking such a jump?" said Signor Stefano, staring at him.

"Ah!" said Beppo, looking at him with the genuine *contadino* shrewdness (more common, however, among the Tuscan than among the Romagnole peasantry), "that is another matter. That did not enter into our contract. And your worship may take anything you please for granted on that subject."

"No. I suppose it was to escape from the Signorina here; but I won't take it for granted, and I won't ask any questions. I never do; specially when there is reason to think that it may be unpleasant to answer them. But it might possibly be," continued the lawyer, looking hard at him, that you might take an interest in a paper I have got in my pocket here; merely a matter of public news, you know; but you might like to hear it."

Giulia and Beppo looked at each other; and Giulia's breath began to come rather short, as Signor Stefano pulled out a huge pocket-book, and took from it a paper printed in large letters on one side only,—evidently one of the proclamations prepared for sticking up on the walls and public places, in the manner the Italian government uses as a means of communicating with its subjects.

"I got this at Fossombrone this morning. A score or so of them had been brought up from Fano in the night. They were only out yesterday evening!"

And then he proceeded to read a statement addressed to all those who had been led away by evil advice and persuasion to leave their homes, in order to avoid the

conscription. It was recited, that it being the special wish of "Vittore Emmanuele, by the Grace of God, and by the National Will, King of Italy," to treat his new subjects of Romagna and the Marches with the utmost possible clemency and indulgence, and it being perfectly well known to the government that in the great majority of cases the deserters had been led into disobedience to the laws by those who ought to have been the first to urge on them the duty of obeying them, therefore it was the pleasure of his aforesaid Majesty, on the occasion of his coming into that part of his dominions for the first time, to offer a free pardon to all such deserters as should give themselves up to the military authorities on or before a day named.

"Oh, Beppo, can you hesitate now?" exclaimed Giulia, speaking aside to him, as the lawyer was putting back the proclamation into his pocket-book.

"I told you just now, Giulia, that it was written that you were to be the saving of me, if I am to be saved!" he answered in the same tone. "Giulia, if you will say that you love me, and will be mine when I come back from serving my time, I will give myself up to-morrow. If not, I go back to the hills! If it is to be 'yes,' cry *Viva l'Italia!*"

"*Viva l'Italia!*" cried Giulia aloud, without any hesitation; but with a shake in her voice, and a tear in her eye, as she stole her hand timidly out from her side to seek for his.

"*Viva l'Italia!*" shouted Beppo in reply, in a voice that made the vault of the tunnel, at the mouth of which they were standing, ring again.

"Eh! well! yes, with all my heart, *Viva l'Italia!*" said Signor Stefano. "A very good end to the proclamation. There it is at the bottom, but I did not read it, because that is a matter of course!"

"Ah! you took it for granted, Signor Stefano. I did not!" said Beppo, speaking to one of his companions, but meaning his words for the other. "I do not mind owning to you, Signor Stefano," he continued, "though

you are kind enough to abstain, as you say, from asking questions, that the proclamation you have shown us has a special interest for me. I have been out to escape a bad number drawn at Fano the other day. But that proclamation has decided me to surrender myself;—that, and one or two other things!” he added, with a look at Giulia.

“I am very glad to have helped to bring you to that decision, Signor! very glad! What! turn bandit and outlaw, to avoid serving a few years! It is madness! A respectable-looking young fellow like you, too, to think of throwing your life away in that way!”

“You see, Beppo, this gentleman says just the same as Signor Sandro said at Fano!”

“What, Signor Sandro at Fano?” asked the Cagli lawyer,—“not my good friend, Sandro Bartoldi?”

“Yes! Signor Sandro Bartoldi, the lawyer at Fano,” said Beppo. “Is he a friend of yours?”

“*Altro!* I was dining with him the day before yesterday; and he was talking a great deal about the men who have left their homes, and taken to the hills! It is a very bad job! A great many families ruined! He was telling me of one case—and upon my life, now I look at you, I should not wonder—upon my life!—but I won’t take it for granted. Did you ever happen, Signor, to hear of such a man as Beppo Vanni, of Bella Luce, at Santa Lucia?”

“Why, that’s the man you helped to pull out of the water at the Furlo pass!” said Beppo.

“Well, now, that’s an odd chance. Old Sandro Bartoldi was talking a deal about you, I can tell you! I am right glad, I assure you, Signor Vanni, in having contributed to your resolution to put yourself at one with the law. And this I presume, then, is the Signorina Giulia Vanni! I have heard of her too, from my friend Lisa Bartoldi.”

“Yes, Signor, this is my cousin, Giulia Vanni,” replied Beppo, rather in the tone of one who means to add,—“and I should like to hear what any one has to say against *that!*”

"Ah—h—h—h ! Yes ! yes ! yes ! yes ! I see, I see, I see ! There are one or two things, then, that I positively must take for granted this once, just for the last time ! And now, Signora, that you have found the gentleman, and induced him to cry '*Viva l'Italia* !' after you, how do you mean to take your prisoner home ? "

"Really, to tell you the truth, I am very much at a loss how to take him home, Signor Stefano ! For the fact is, that I walked all the way from Bella Luce here in the course of last night ; and I hardly know how I shall get back again ! One thing, however, is very certain, and you really may take it safely for granted, that now I have at last succeeded in apprehending him, I do not mean to let him go again."

And a commentary on this speech, too, was supplied by Giulia's eyes, for the special and exclusive benefit of her cousin Beppo.

"I see what it will have to be," said Signor Stefano. "I shall have to lend you the *calessino* to go back to Bella Luce. That will be the best plan ; and I can do no less for my friend Sandro's sake ! It will be your best way too. You had better go to Bella Luce to-day, and go into town and give yourself up to-morrow."

"I shall stay very little time at home," said Beppo, bethinking himself that he would much rather, if possible, avoid meeting the priest. "If you are kind enough, Signor Stefano, to do as you say, we shall reach Bella Luce to-night ; and I would be off to Fano the first thing in the morning."

Beppo was forgetting that this departure would be settled for him, without his having any voice in the matter, as soon as he should be in the hands of the corporal's party at Bella Luce. But in the upshot it came to the same thing.

"Well, I'll tell you how it must be," said Signor Stefano. "You shall come on with me as far as Aqualagna. I shall be able to get a conveyance of some sort there, to take me to Cagli, without any difficulty. The pony shall have a feed ; and then you shall start."

"I do not know how to thank you for so much kindness, Signor. I am afraid, too, that you will have to wait for any manifestation of my gratitude till I return from serving my time, if such a day shall ever arrive," said Beppo, rather ruefully.

"To be sure it will arrive, Signor Beppo ; and I shall come and see you at Bella Luce. And in that case, I suppose I need not say farewell to *la Signora Giulia* here, for ever ! May I take that for granted, eh ? Meantime, tell Sandro Bartoldi how I pulled you out of the river at the Passo di Furlo, and sent you in to give yourself up in the custody of your captor."

"*Addio, Signor Stefano ! e tante grazie !*" said Beppo.

"*Ma grazie davvero, Signore !*" re-echoed Giulia ; "for I don't know how I should ever have got home myself, let alone taking home my prisoner !" she added.

"*Addio, cari miei, e a rivederci !*" said the worthy lawyer. And so Giulia took home her conscript.

CHAPTER VI.

WHY DIDN'T SHE MARRY THE CORPORAL ?

THE journey from Aqualagna home to Bella Luce was a pleasanter one for Giulia than her last return had been, sitting by the side of old farmer Paolo, as she came back from Fano. There are sundry things in the world which depend altogether for their pleasantness or the reverse on the companions in conjunction with whom they may be performed or undergone. But a journey stands pre-eminent in this respect ! And of all journeys, a journey in a *calessino*,—which is but a somewhat prettier and more classical name for a gig of a rather less comfortable and more picturesque form than the English respectability-vouching conveyance,—a journey in a *calessino* is the most striking manifestation of the truth of the proposition. There is no escape, no mitigation, no turning your back upon a man, no giving him the cold shoulder even, in the case. You may keep your distance in your corner, and maintain a dignified system of non-intercourse in a post-chaise. But in a gig it is not possible to do so.

It had been dreadful to sit by the side of that snarling and snceing old man, to be the helpless butt of his ill-

humour, and the compulsory sharer in every jolt, and victim of every gibe. Now the road back to Bella Luce seemed a very short one, though, in fact, it was somewhat longer than that which Giulia had traversed the previous night. For the way down from the village into the valley of the Metauro, passing by the old tower at the back of the churchyard, and thence plunging into the woods that for the most part cover the labyrinth of little valleys that lie between it and the main artery valley of the above-named river, is in many parts of it a mere bridle-path, impracticable even for such light vehicles as that lent by the lawyer of Cagli to Beppo and Giulia. They were obliged to pass through Fossombrone, and take a somewhat longer route, which brought them into the village at the foot or lower part of it—at the side of it, that is, nearer to Bella Luce—instead of by the back or higher part of it, on the other side of the church, the churchyard, and the *cura*.

"*Viva l'Italia!* you know, Giulia!" said Beppo, as soon as they were through the darkness of the tunnel on their way homewards. "If you take me prisoner now, you know the terms of the bargain?"

"I have no wish to be off it, Beppo—as you know, Signor, quite as well as I can tell you," answered Giulia.

"I know it! Oh, come now, Giulia! How was I to know it, when it's only within the last hour that I have got you to say a word of comfort to me; and I have been striving for it for the last three years—not to say more or less all your life? Perhaps if I had asked you before, when I was wet through, you would have listened to me. It's true I never tried that way before; but I think it's the only thing I have not tried."

"You have never tried getting into trouble before, Beppo *mio*," said she; "not that, after all, to be quite honest," she continued, after a little pause of meditation,—"not that, after all, it was so much your trouble as my own that has made the difference."

"Made what difference, Giulia?"

"Why, the difference you were speaking of, Beppo;

the difference that you were saying must be because you are wet through now, and always had dry clothes on before when you asked me to marry you. But it was that my heart was dry with pride, and now that it has been wetted through and through with tears of sorrow and humility."

"I never thought that you were proud, Giulia," said Beppo, simply.

"Yes I was, Beppo," she said; "I was too proud to bear all that will be said of me on account of this love of ours. I was ready to break my heart in secret rather than let them say that I had schemed to catch a great match. Ah, Beppo ! Beppo ! if you had been as poor as I, or if I had been the rich one, and you poor as I, do you think I should have behaved as I did ? Do you think I was not breaking my heart all the time ? And that night when you stopped me under the half-way tree—the night before I was to go to Fano—oh, that night ! that night ! Could you not guess ? could you not see that if your heart was sore to part, mine was sorer ? that I was breaking my heart because I was going away and could not tell you that I loved you, and nobody else in all the wide, wide world, and never should or would or could love anybody else ? Oh, Beppo, could you not feel it ?"

"But why then did you always say quite the contrary ?" remonstrated Beppo.

"I have told you, Beppo—because I was proud ; because I could not bear the sneers and gibes and reproaches of your father and of Carlo, and of everybody ; that they should say I had schemed and laid myself out to catch you, to lure you,—not because I loved you, but because I wanted to be mistress one day of Bella Luce ; and that I had stood in the way of your fortune, and prevented your making a rich marriage—I who was taken into your father's house for charity. I was too proud to bear all this. And so I was content, rather than bear it, to break my own heart and vex yours. And I know that they will say all this ! I know they will !"

"If I hear a human tongue wag with any such cursed

lie ; if I see but an eye look a thought of the kind——” said Beppo, grinding his teeth.

“ But you won’t see or hear anything of the sort, Beppo *mio* ! At least, I hope not ; and though I shall, I have learned to bear it. That is what I was saying just now. My proud heart has been wetted through and through with tears of real heart-break and humility. I won’t be proud any more, Beppo. You know, Beppo, whether it is you yourself, or your money, or your father’s money, that I love ; and that shall be enough for me. I won’t mind what anybody else says.”

“ But, Giulia dearest, you told me, you know, that you had refused the corporal,” said Beppo.

“ To be sure I did. *Che* ! What was he to me ? ”

“ But didn’t you tell me that he was very well off, or going to be, when his *unele* dies ? ”

“ Oh, yes ; I know all about it,” said Giulia, laughing. “ Specially I know that it is all freehold land, and most of it pasture ; for the poor little man told me so over and over again. You see you don’t know how to make love, Beppo ! That’s where it is. You never told me anything about the money in Signor Paolo’s coffers, nor about the goodness of the land at Bella Luee, nor anything of the kind. Corporal Tenda told me all about it. I shall never forget that his land, near Cuneo, is all freehold ! ”

“ And I have got no freehold land, nor anything of the sort,” cried Beppo ; “ and how can they say, then, that you wanted me for what I have got, when, if that was what you were after, you might have had so much better ? I should like to have an answer to that ! ” said Beppo, triumphantly. “ Why did not you marry the corporal ? That is what I say ! Why didn’t she marry the corporal ? ”

But the only answer Beppo got to this reiterated question interfered with his driving to that degree, that the little Marchesan pony, accustomed as he was to minute guns behind him, discharged at regular intervals by Signor Stefano’s whip, had long since, on missing those

reminders, subsided into a very pleasantly sauntering walk. For Italian drivers do not take the same precaution for keeping their whip arm free that English coachmen do. They sit not on the right hand of a person sitting on the same seat with them, but on the left. And in this position, you see, when the space is small,—and Signor Stefano's *calessino* was a very little one—and when into the bargain your fare lays her head down on your shoulder, it very much interferes with that vigorous cracking of your whip which Italian coachmanship requires, and may be said to constitute a real case of driving under difficult circumstances. Finding his whip arm thus disabled, Beppo had given up that part of the business as a bad job altogether; and putting the whip out of his hand entirely, resting it on the seat beside his knee, with its butt end down by the side of his foot in the bottom of the little carriage, he had that arm free for any other purpose which the emergencies of the case might seem to require. And really there was another purpose, besides cracking the whip, that did seem to require some attention from the arm so placed at liberty. It must be understood that the little light *calessini* of this part of the Apennine are constructed without any back to them at all. The seat is a comfortably wide, but entirely open and backless cushion, suspended between upright supporters at the two extremities. So that a person sitting thereon has nothing at his back at all; and if, under such circumstances, your fare *will* lay down her head upon your shoulder, it really does seem as if there were only one disposition of your right arm in any degree open to your choice.

Notwithstanding all these disadvantageous circumstances, the pony had made a quiet little shambling trot of it as long as the road was down hill,—which it is most part of the way from the tunnel of the Furlo pass to Fossombrone. But before coming to that little town on the Metauro, there is a rather considerable ascent to the huge one-arched bridge by which that river is spanned, a little before the town is entered. And there the pony,

unreminded of his duties by any manifestations from behind him, diminished his little trot to a lazy, zigzagging walk up the hill, just as Beppo was triumphantly pushing the point of his argument.

"Why didn't she marry the corporal? That is what I say! Why didn't she marry the corporal?" said Beppo, raising his voice in the warmth of his eloquence, but not enforcing it with any gesticulation incompatible with the occupation of his left hand by the reins, and of his right in the manner the reader wots of.

"Why didn't she marry the corporal? That is the question!" urged Beppo.

"Ah! that is just what I wanted to know! But I found it out before you did, Signor Beppo! And, *per Bacco!* I think that anybody who happened to be here present, might find out the answer to the question for themselves!"

The voice proceeded from the side of the road, at a spot which, though the *calessino* was in the act of passing before it, was almost hidden by an abrupt angle in the parapet wall of the approaches to the bridge. It was a voice perfectly well known to both the travellers in the *calessino*; and, in fact, proceeded from the very individual in question. The corporal and his comrade, having marched all night on Giulia's traces from Bella Luce to the Furlo pass, and having then turned unrested to march back again, had not made any great speed, and had availed themselves of a stone bench in the shade, erected against the parapet wall, to rest themselves. So that moderate as the little trot of Signor Stefano's pony had been, and notwithstanding that Beppo and Giulia must have started on their way to Bella Luce nearly two hours after the corporal, the pony overtook the latter at the bridge of Fossombrone.

At this sudden and most unexpected interposition, Giulia's head was very quickly raised from the shoulder on which it had been reposing; but the right arm, which should have been holding the whip, was only drawn the tighter around that which it was encircling. At the

same time the other hand, whether purposely or not, drew in the reins sufficiently to cause the pony, who was disposed to take the very slightest hint of that kind, to come to a full stop.

"So you have been more fortunate than I was, Signora," continued the corporal, coming up to the side of the little vehicle; "and have captured your man. You are taking him in to head-quarters, I see! That's all right! And it's a capital way, by-the-bye, of securing a capture, that way I see you have of fixing his arm around your own body. He can't take it away, anyhow! I see you have been in the water, Signor Beppo! What a devil of a jump that was!"

"Corporal," said Beppo, "I owe you my life. And you owe me the attempt to take away yours. What can I say to you? And how can I look you in the face?"

"Why, by turning round this way you could! But it's difficult, I see, fixed as you are to your captor! Did you try to take my life? Ah, yes; fired at me! So you did! I had forgotten all about it. We don't recollect such things long in our profession. And, besides, you could not have meant to hit me, and miss me twice running, at that distance,—impossible! So we will say no more about that! But what I say is," continued the corporal, changing his tone, winking at Giulia, and imitating Beppo's manner, "what I say is, why didn't she marry the corporal? Ah, Signor Beppo," he continued, again changing his manner, and speaking with earnestness, "why did not you find that out sooner? Why did you ever allow yourself to doubt why she did not marry the corporal? Should you not have known right well why the corporal never had the ghost of a chance, from first to last? Ah! all I wish is that I may fall in with,—I won't say such another girl, for there is no hope of that,—but with some one that I can love, and who will love me half as well as your cousin loves you! Why would she not marry the corporal? Why would she not marry the king, if he asked her? as no doubt he would, if he got the chance! Because there was only one man

in all the world that she cared a straw for ; and for him she was ready to follow him in sorrow and disgrace to the end of the earth, and to play the corporal any manner of trick to save him from falling into the corporal's hands ! That's why. And now, friend Beppo, I think it is very likely that she will marry the corporal, after all ! ”

Giulia gave a little jump, and Beppo tightened his grasp of her waist, and glared at the man, whose face he had just professed he could not look on !

“ Ah, yes ! You may look as fierce about it as you please ! ” continued he ; “ depend upon it, she will marry the corporal, after all—Corporal Beppo Vanni ! He'll be the happy man ! ”

“ Ah—h—h ! ” said Giulia.

Beppo stretched out his left hand, dropping the reins for the purpose, to the corporal, saying, as he did so,—

“ I am slow to understand, corporal, as you have seen—*pur troppo* ! But I'm slow to forget, too ; and I shall not forget you in a hurry ! ”

“ And I have got some good news for you,” said the corporal ; and then he told them of the proclamation that was just out, of which he had heard as he came along the road. The travellers told him how they had already heard of it from the new acquaintance who had lent them the means of getting back to Bella Lucc.

“ And now,” said the corporal, “ of course you are going to Fano to give yourself up. I presume you will go in to-morrow morning ? ”

“ That is my purpose,” said Beppo.

“ Because, you know, by rights I ought to arrest you now directly ; but if I have your word that you mean to surrender to-morrow morning, why I know I can trust you, and I am content. I shall march in to-morrow morning, and report that I have been informed that you had gone to surrender yourself. There will be no need for us to go up to Bella Lucc ; we can stay and rest ourselves here in Fossombrone, and go into the city in the morning. It will be well for you to be there first. What time can you be in Fano ? ”

"I'll be there a couple of hours after daylight," said Beppo ; "that is," he added, "if your comrades there will let me come !"

"Ay, to be sure ; that is well thought of. I must go up home with you, after all," said the corporal. "Perhaps you can let me manage to stick myself on behind here, somehow ?"

So Signor Stefano's pony had an extra load to climb the hill from Fossombrone to Bella Luce ; but before entering the village the corporal got down, and allowed his companions to go on and make their entry into Santa Lucia, and arrive at Bella Luce without his superintendence.

CHAPTER VII.

CONCLUSION.

So Giulia brought home her captive unaided ! The route by which they entered the village did not take them past the door of the *cura*, as has been already explained ; and they hoped, in consequence, that they would escape falling in with the priest. He was, however, just entering the lower end of the village, on his return from Bella Luce, where he had been in consultation with Signor Paolo respecting the disappearance of Giulia from home in the preceding night, and had been pointing out how thoroughly lost and abandoned she was, and how he had always said and thought so, when Beppo and she made their appearance in the village street in their *calessino* ! He and they both caught sight of each other at the same moment ; and the two fugitives made up their minds to a somewhat stormy quarter of an hour. But the priest judged the occasion to be one of those when discretion is the better part of valour, and suddenly turned into a doorway as they approached him. The reader will not be displeased to hear, however, that this tardy discretion in meddling with Beppo Vanni's affairs was too tardy to save his reverence from the consequences of his share in

the events which have been narrated in these pages ; for among the most recent news from the Romagna is that of the conviction and punishment of a number of parish priests for the crime of instigating their parishioners to desertion ; and in the list of these may be found the name of Don Evandro Baluffi,—or, at all events, of one who acted exactly as Don Evandro has been described to have acted.

“A rose by any other name,” we know, “would smell as sweet ;” and the conviction of a priest, under any other name, let us hope, will prove as salutary !

Beppo told his father, in the most respectful manner, that he meant to give himself up to the military authorities at Fano on the morrow, and to marry his cousin Giulia as soon as his period of service should have expired. The old farmer scratched his head, and said he must speak to the priest about it to-morrow.

Eventually, however, the old man was persuaded, mainly by the eloquence of the corporal, who arrived at Bella Luce on that memorable Sunday night about half-an-hour after Giulia and Beppo, to recede from any active opposition to his son’s wishes. It was remarkable what an authority the corporal became in the old farmer’s eyes, as soon as the latter found out that he was heir to a snug little farm, and that it was all freehold land !

Signor Tenda turned out to be a good prophet, too, for Giulia *did* marry the corporal. Beppo was sent, on joining his regiment, not against the Austrians, but to aid in putting down the brigandage in Naples ; and in that specially dangerous and disagreeable service he was fortunate enough to have an opportunity of distinguishing himself by the capture of a noted chief, who had given great trouble to the administration for a long time, to such good purpose, that he got his stripes at once, together with a year’s leave, and permission to marry.

Of course Signor Sandro Bartoldi relented, and Lisa married Captain Brilli. Of course Giulia went to live with *la Dossi* during Beppo’s absence. Of course her marriage has been, in all respects, a happy one.

It is not likely, however, that she will ever live at Bella Luce, as she had wished to do "always;" for, on an arrangement being come to that Beppo should be the heir to old Paolo's savings, and that Carlo should succeed him in the farm, Corporal Beppo declared that he should prefer sticking to the flag, and pushing his fortunes in the army.

THE END.

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